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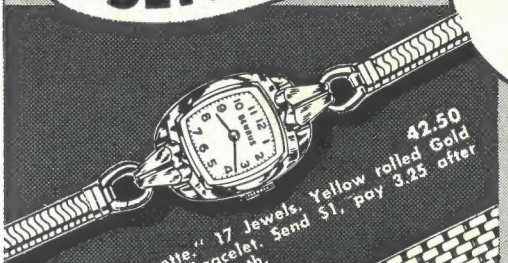

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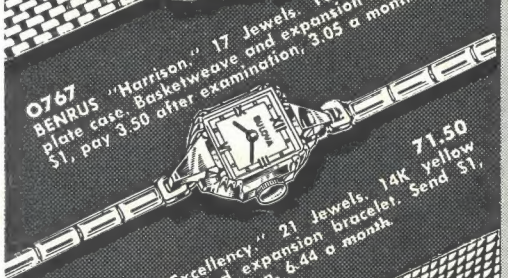

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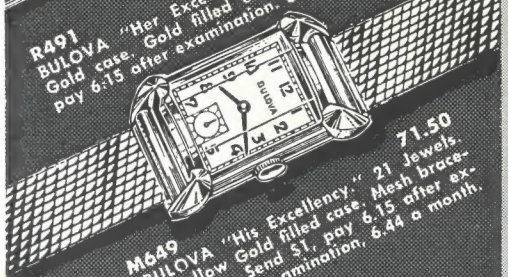

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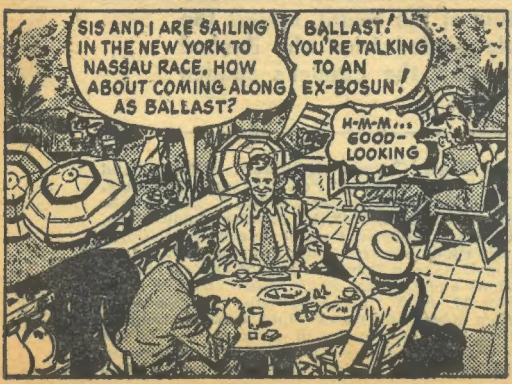
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Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

December, 1948 Vol. 120, No. 2

THE NOVELETTE

Seven Padlocks to Hell.....WILLIAM O'SULLIVAN 16

Something had gone wrong for all of them and now they were sweating out their suspensions working for Joe Halley. . . . Six blacklisted pilots—all of them hating their boss—waiting for the day when they could fly as free men again. "The Gentlemen from Hades," the other flyboys called them and they were all that and more!

SHORT STORIES

The Noose of Allah.....ROBINSON MacLEAN 40

Jeff Acres, my partner, was drunk as a skunk—that was all I could figure. We had a nice business hauling caskets across the Red Sea to Jidda for rich Moslems who wanted to get put away in the Holy City of Mecca. Everything was going fine when I began to get these nonsense wires from Jeff in Khartoum—all about a character called Al Masad, "The Noose of Allah."

The Bosun's Mite.....ROBERT CARSE 48

It was a bitter, implacable feud between Bosun Jake Ketcham and the little sailor, Bill Fox. Ketcham was big and dumb and Fox was undersized and smart—but there was more to it than size and brains.

Charley Hoe Handle and the Weasel's Chance.....JIM KJELGAARD 58

It was bad enough when Three-Buck Malone walked into Warden Horse Jenkins' office and announced that he too was a warden with papers to prove it. But that was only the beginning—after Three-Buck came Jebby Cahoon, Tom Colly, Jack Dunner—and the woods were full of wardens, all ready, willing and eager to start tossing their neighbors into the clink.

Of Lords and Lunatics.....F. R. BUCKLEY 88

In which Luigi Caradosso, sometime Captain of the Guard, relates the tale of the siege of Porli and the feeble-minded friar who daubed himself with dust and ashes and prophesied the citadel's sudden doom—and how that prediction came true.

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BE OUT ON DECEMBER 10TH ◆ ◆ ◆

A Piece of Woola-Woola.....DOUGLAS LEACH 96
Joe Quigley and me were on the tramp through the sheep country—just a couple of swaggies—but that was the Golden Age in Australia and the station owners were full of hospitality and the brotherhood of man. The trouble was, our cannibal friend, Woola-Woola, loved his fellow-man too—especially when he hadn't tasted meat in weeks.

THE SERIAL

Bargain in Bombers (2nd of 3 parts).....M. V. HEBERDEN 62
Paul Weston, unofficial representative for Uncle Sam, continues his investigation into the attempted purchase of war-surplus Navy amphibian bombers by an agent for the exiled party in a Central American "banana republic." And as Weston comes closer to the secret group of revolutionairies, trouble comes closer to Weston!

FACT STORIES

High Adventure in the Old West..... ROBERT MONROE 87
A few notes on the guns of the Frontier period—and how they helped make the Old West what it was.

Little Giant.....DAVID LAVENDER 106
Orphaned at the age of four, the amazing career of tiny Otto Mears led him from his birthplace in Russia, in 1841, to the goldfields of California, service with Kit Carson, the life of an Indian trader and railroad builder—and the creation of a fabulous empire.

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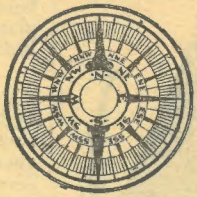
Cover painted for Adventure *by Malvin Singer*
Kenneth S. White, Editor



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LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to *Lost Trails* will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and concerning women are declined as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

I would like to get in touch with M/Sgt Laurence Allan Cross, R.A. 6944209. He is 5'11", weighs about 140 lbs., has a ruddy complexion, thick, light brown hair, and his middle right finger is deformed on the end. He did have a blond mustache, is very artistic and reads quite a bit. Any information concerning this man will be appreciated and should be sent to D. E. Cross, 2225 Callow Ave., Baltimore, Md.

Please locate my brother, Harley Raymond Buliher, tall, fair complexion, about 35 or 40. Contact Gerald Buliher, 516 E. Dutton St., Kalamazoo, Mich.

I would like to locate Dock Gainy. The last known address was 213 A Princeton St., Liberty Homes, North Charleston, S. C. He is now believed to be on a farm not far from Charleston. Please write Joseph LeRoy Landry P. O. Box 111, Napoleonville, La.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Arthur R. Robbins, 37 years old, recently in the U.S. Army, and who was last heard from December 1947, in Arlington, Virginia, please write Walter J. Kennedy, P.O. Box 869, St. John's, Newfoundland. Robbins' forte is music and at one time he played guitar with Eddie Arnold. Hung out in Washington, D.C.

I wish to gather any information about my old buddy, Walter G. Chandler, nicknamed "Cow-Creek." He was born in Cow Creek, Florida, is about 57 years old, 5'6", black hair and eyes. Served two hitches in the 160th C.A.C., mostly at Fort Stevens, Ore. Last heard of at Camp Pike, Ark., 1918-1919. He once belonged to the Knights of Pythias. Contact M. C. Breckinridge, 113-N. Wilson Way, Stockton, Calif.

I would like to locate Thomas A. Jones, last heard of in Gunnison, Colorado, in 1934. He lived in Gary, Indiana in 1933 and part of '34. He was a body and fender man and worked for Sharps Garage in Indiana and Hartman's Garage in Montrose, Colo. Please get in touch with D. G. Johnson, 735 Custer Ave., Billings, Mont.

(Continued on page 8)

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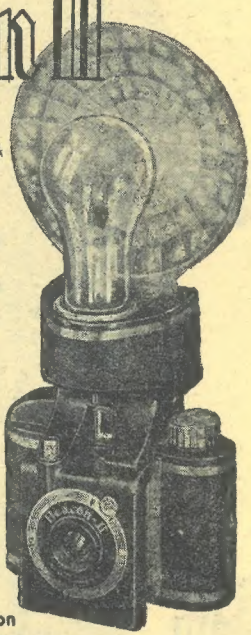

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(Continued from page 6)

I would like to hear from anyone knowing the whereabouts of John Emil Gabrielson, born in Minnesota 47 years ago. He was last heard from in Roman, Montana in 1934, but has been reported as being in Stockton, Calif., in 1940. He is slim, has brown hair, blue eyes, and has a thumb missing on the right hand. Please write to his brother, Ervin Gabrielson, 28 Randall St., Cortland, N. Y.

I would like to locate Phillip C. Steed, last heard from in or around Chicago, Ill. If he or person knowing his address reads this, write Leonard Steed, Talbotton, Ga.

Anyone knowing W. C. Allen, age 23, weight around 240 lbs., ruddy complexion, works mostly as a truck driver, get in touch with E. V. Allen, Box 314, Hull, Liberty Co., Texas.

I would appreciate contacting any of the following men: Edward Henry Boudreau who used to work in the U.S. Forestry Office in Portland, Oregon, before the war. When last heard from, he was serving in the 29th Engineers stationed in Portland, Ore., in 1942. Clarence Blanchard was in the Merchant Marine and his last known home address was Seattle, Wash. He was on an oil tanker going overseas in 1943. Paul de Jerld was a soldier in Co. H of the 114th Infantry and last heard of at Fort Lewis, Washington, in 1942. Contact E. G. Sumner, 410 Montana Ave., Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

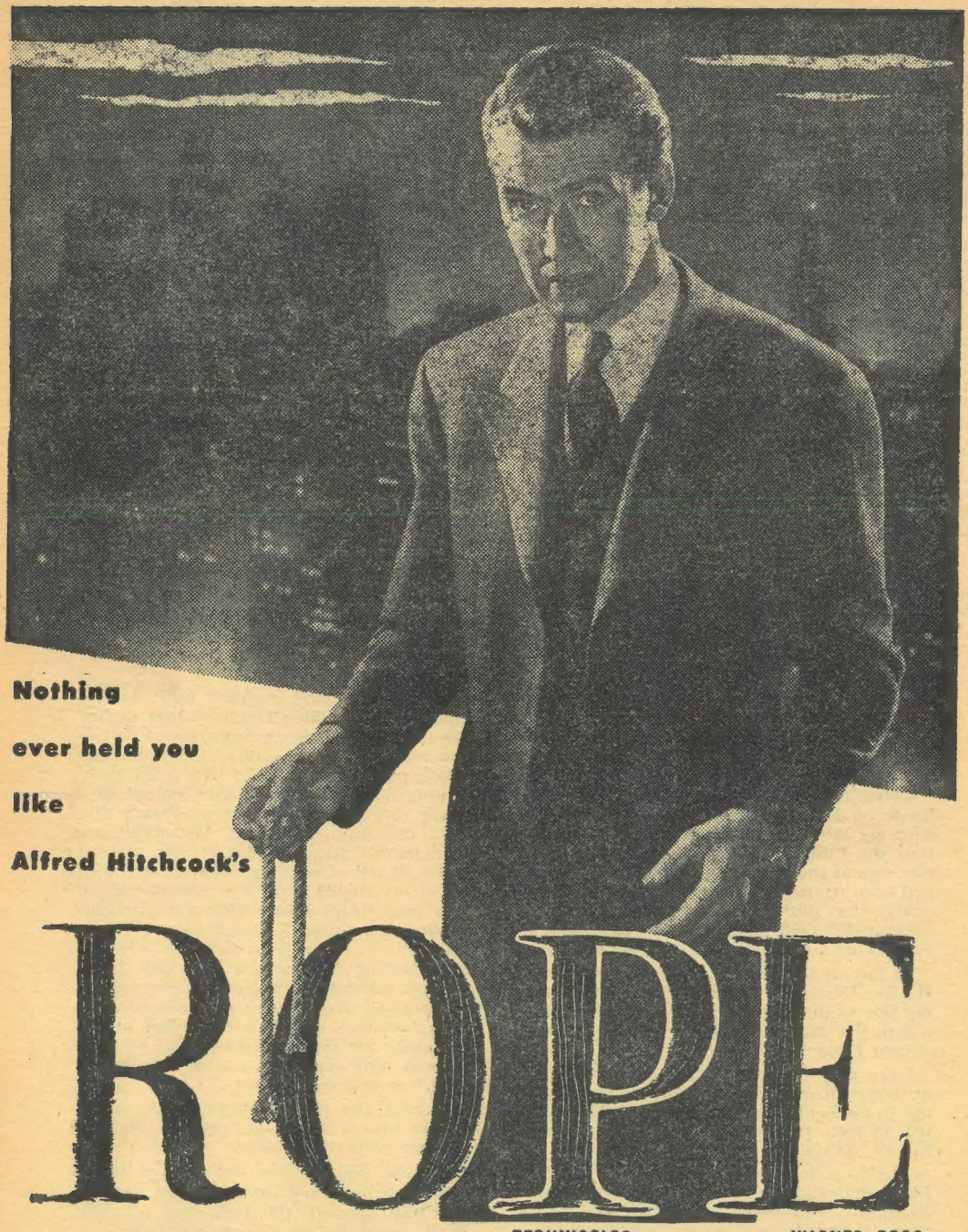
I would like to find my father, Ferdinand Elijah Wood, about 86 years old, of Scottish descent, and 5'6" tall. The last I heard, he was living in the neighborhood of Bellflower, California, or Maywood. Write Joseph Herschel Wood, 2048 Capitol Drive, San Pedro, Calif.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Walter A. Downer, a native of New York City who moved in the '20s to the southwest and last known in 1942 to be in El Paso, Texas, please communicate with Joseph Davis, Prospect St., Watertown, Conn.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Edward C. Hobaugh, Jr., age 32, height 5'8", 145 lbs., dark hair, brown eyes, medium complexion with MUTT tattoed on one arm, please commmunicate with M. Ball, Mall Road, Ardentown, Delaware. Last heard that he was working for Fruehauf Trailer Co., Los Angeles, Calif.

I would like to locate Orin Thompson, last heard of working in Wyoming. His parents were Grace and Frank Thompson who, in 1944, lived at 1105 Stout St., Denver, Colorado. Also, I would like to find Nicholas Dusic who lived somewhere in New Jersey and who made paper flowers, lamp shades and gifts. Contact Byron Myrick, Rt. No. 4, Box 540, Visalia, Calif.

Please notify Roscoe J. Frye, 723 W. Mansfield, Spokane, Washington, for information concerning Albert Scott of Tulsa. Oklahoma, or Paul D. Fristo, of Spokane, Washington, both of whom I served with in the Marines in the last war.



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THE CAMP-FIRE

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

WILLIAM O'SULLIVAN sends along some mighty interesting glimpses into the world of a few years back to accompany his exciting, right-up-to-the minute yarn of the commercial flying game—"Seven Padlocks to Hell"—which takes off on page 16. Incidentally, the author called his story "Halley's Comet" (you'll see why below) and then we pulled a fast one on him and switched the title to "Seven Padlocks to Hell." Seemed like a more appropriate label, and we hope Bill will forgive us for the change. But judging the guy's generosity from the fact that he referred to the following as "a few short words about myself," we're not too worried about it—

The title of my current air-story in this issue of *Adventure*—"Halley's Comet"—came to me thirty-eight years before the story did.

I remember standing atop the roof of our house on Fifty-eighth Street, in New York, with my brothers and my parents, watching into the quietly dying June dusk for the first sign of the "star with the hot-foot" that had been named by Edmund Halley, British astronomer, 1656-1742. Those dates are important—Edmund Halley; born 1656, died 1742. They had a profound effect on my life.

In fact, it is safe to say that the original Halley's Comet was as downright a climax in my life as the Flight Of Number Thirteen was in the lives of *my* Halley and his "Gentlemen From Hell."

I can remember that balmy June evening as though it were last week; but it was long ago in the hourly count of things, and longer still in fact. It was in the last days of The Era Of Truth.

The New York Giants *were* giants! Their home diamond *was* a polo grounds, when baseball wasn't being played on it. The Yankees were people from New England, and the American League Baseball Club which eloped with the name later were then The Highlanders, because their baseball diamond tended to high ground in the outfield. The Brooklyn were known as "Suburbas" in reference to their then suburban location; or "Trolley-Dodgers," because Brooklyn was criss-crossed with trolley-cars.

The men now known as "New York's Finest" were then called "The Metropolitans," and they wore mustaches, belts, scabbarded clubs (which were more often out of their resting places than in them) and dome-shaped hats which looked as if they had come out from under a bed.

Jack Johnson was Heavyweight Champ, but about to risk his title in a match with the resurgent muscle-man, Jim Jeffries, on July Fourth that year (Truth prevailed, it being the Era Of Truth: Lil Artha won); Mugsy McGraw was a "mug," and when his Giants couldn't break up the Tinker-to-Evers-to-Chance combination on the field at the Polo Grounds, Mugsy was trying to break it up with his fists after the game and under the grandstand.

Subway rides were a nickel; Fifth Avenue Buses were open-air adventures that dashed down Riverside Drive, swooped along Broadway, made a two-wheel turn at Fifty-seventh Street; pulled the opposite tires loose again turning down Fifth; and then slowed to a stately 10 m.p.h along an Easter Parade that was a fact, and not a song. The brand-new "Alexander's Ragtime Band" was coming stridently out of hurdy-gurdies; or strangled out of lily-shaped horns that narrow-waisted to a small black tube which was a revolutionary adaptation of a man named Victor. A Camel was still a desert-taxi, Lucky Strikes were finding the pennies that had fallen through sidewalk grills (you got you a string and a small magnet, and you were in business), Fatimas were the fat babes in the Carnivals; and Sweet Caporals and Virginia Rounds were cigarettes. . .and also "coffin-nails," so said our elders.

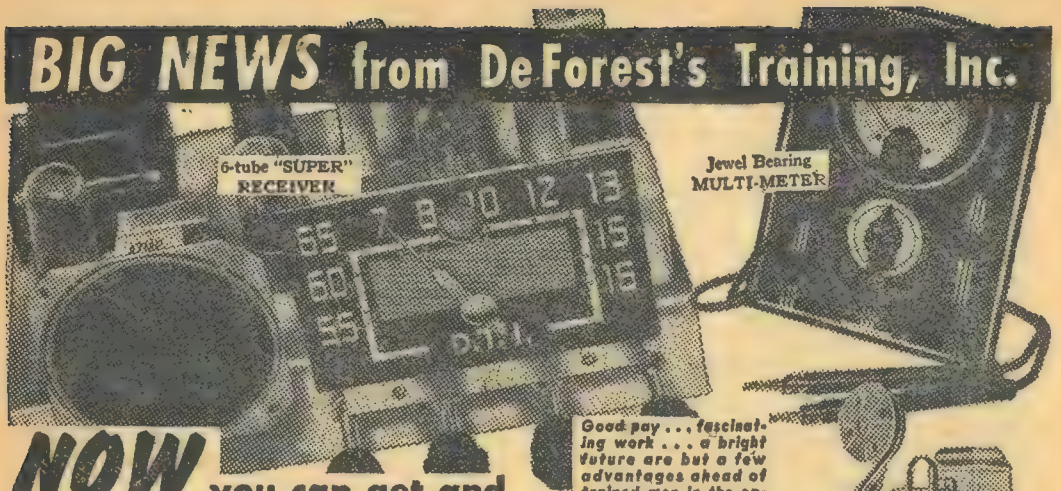
Anyway, that June Halley's Comet was to appear, and it would not again be seen for another seventy-six years.

On the night it was due I went up to the fourth floor and up the ladder through the trap door to the roof, and all New York was on the other roofs, watching.

The night blushed darker in the accusing silence of the New York's 4,000,000 population, and then—a something! A tremor of nothing that faded, was re-born, persisted, grew, and—blazed! A roar went up for Halley's two-century old predicted Home Run!

(Continued on page 12)

BIG NEWS from DeForest's Training, Inc.



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(Continued from page 10)

Like Babe Ruth would in 1932, he'd called it. Over my roof!

"There it is! Halley's Comet!"

Instead of going right to bed that night, when we all came down from the roof, I got a pencil and did some "figgerin'."

"Let's see. . .76 from 1910. . .76 from 1834 . . .76 from 1758. . .Halley saw the Comet the first time in 1682. He never saw it again. Since even he said it came only every 76 years, he never saw it before. How could he *know* that?"

So, naturally, I went to Dad. Dad knew everything. Dad would tell me. He did: "You see, William, Halley's Comet has an inclination of 162-degrees to the Ecliptic, its perihelion distance is 0.59, its Apchelion distance 35.52, its Longitude of Ascension Node on the Ecliptic is 57 degrees, and its distance from the Node to the Perihelion is scanned at 112-degrees, and since it can be seen only when close to the Sun, and the Sun is some 92-million miles from Earth, and its light takes eight minutes to reach us. . ."

Dad didn't see any change in me; but there had been one. That night, the entire course of my life had been changed, by a man named Halley. I mean, if Halley and Dad could know all these things without ever having been there to check what they said—how far away the sun was; how the comet was tilted; when it would be back again, and exactly what *time* it would be back!

I was going to be an airplane pilot like Orville Wright; and I was going to be a writer like Jack London. Jack London had said you didn't have to know anything, the editors knew it all. And Orville Wright said you could fly a barn door if you could hook up enough power to it.

I didn't get to fly until 1917, when I was 18; and it wasn't a barn-door I flew, it was an egg-crate with a lot of piano-wire.

After the war of '17-18 got over, they started running the Army again by a book called Regulations, so I got out to do my flying by the wing, and not "by the numbers." I started writing, too. I also even got a job as an editor's assistant when I didn't do any stuff that was mistaken for Jack London's, and I got discouraged. I figured (I'm always figuring) I'd go and be an editor, since I figured they knew it all. What I observed when working for editors sent me quickly back to write again—and fly a little.

When the War of '41 came along, I got in again and this time they didn't have egg-crates with piano wire, this time they had piano-crates, and it looked as if they expected me to fly a hangar, the stuff was so big. But if you can fly a Jenny, you can fly anything. And I had thousands of Jenny hours to prove I could fly anything. So they stuck me into a B-24 Liberator, which is nothing but a four-breasted Jenny with a comfortable arm-chair and lots of things that would have surprised Mr. Victor in the way of music-amplifiers—and gadgets that would even have puzzled my Dad for all his knowing about perihelions and such.

I did a lot of ferrying to war-fronts, being just a kid of starting toward fifty, and not being trusted with bombs. And when the war got over, and they got Regulations dusted off again, I got going back to trying to be like Jack London again . . .

How did I do? I mean, with "Halley's Comet"? All right, I hope.

All right, indeed, we'd say. "Halley's Comet" or "Seven Padlocks to Hell"—it's a darn good yarn, by any name.

DOUGLAS LEACH, who tells the strange tale of the fastest man on two legs in "A Piece of Woola-Woola" steps up to the *Camp-Fire* with some data concerning his own adventures—

When you ask a man like myself to tell you about his past you are certainly taking a big risk, for—as my wife and two kids would tell you—once I get talking of my adventures I am a hard man to stop!

I suppose a war is the biggest adventure that can happen to anyone, so without hesitation I can declare that the most exciting period of my life was between 1914 and 1918. I added three years to my age in 1914, was wounded on Gallipoli soon after my seventeenth birthday, and emerged early in 1919 as a grizzled veteran of twenty, with a restless disposition and an itch to travel.

The summer of 1921 found me holding a "block" of land in the Returned Soldiers Settlement in Coominya, Queensland, but the heat of that summer brought back several bouts of malaria, and I set out to seek a cooler climate. In this I was wildly successful, for by November, 1922, I was working in a tie-camp at Waterways, near Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada, where the thermometer often dropped to fifty below—and once to sixty-below—and where anything over twenty below was considered downright sultry.

In 1923 I filed on a homestead in Flat Lake, in the St. Paul de Metis area, and "proved it up." Then I farmed a more civilised quarter-section till 1930, when I started to earn my living the hard way—by writing. I went to England in 1931, married a Yorkshire girl in 1935—the pleasantest adventure of all—and settled in Devon just before the outbreak of the last war. These days my main hobby is sailing, and as only a crazy man would ever leave Devon—and even a writer doesn't have to be that crazy—I suppose my traveling days are over.

As for "A Piece of Woola-Woola"—the germ of the idea was planted back in the days when I was camped at Coominya, on the Yarraman Creek Line. It was there I used to have periodic visits from a genuine, turtle-necked, leathery old swaggie called Sam. I don't remember his other name, but I do remember some of the yarns he told me. He had tramped all the country between

(Continued on page 14)

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ART INSTRUCTION INC

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(Continued from page 12)

Blackall and Cape York, and if he ever did any work I never heard about it. He had a good eye for a shady spot, a hearty appetite, an unquenchable thirst, and a critical taste for anyone else's cooking. He always declared that the North Queensland blackfellows were the fastest runners in the world, and swore that he had seen one of them run down a kangaroo on foot. Don't ask me how I cooked up the plot for "A Piece of Woola-Woola." What writer can ever explain that?

F. R. BUCKLEY appends a few notes anent Luigi Caradosso's clever stratagem in "Of Lords and Lunatics" which enabled that ingenious scoundrel to breach the walls of the citadel of Porli—

Since few present-day writers about the Italian cinquecento were alive four hundred years ago, we must all, to some extent, be plagiarists of the chroniclers of that period. I sometimes comfort myself by thinking that the sixteenth century stole a lot of our inventions, political and mechanical, before we had had a chance to make them—witness Machiavelli on the political side, and Leonardo da Vinci's diagrams of airplanes, flame-throwers and tanks.

Still, I frequently have a yearning to involve Captain Caradosso in strictly original adventures; events such as did not actually befall anyone of record between the years 1500 and 1580—I specify the period because it's notorious that at some time in history everything conceivable to the mind of man has happened to someone or other.

Well—the basic idea under "Of Lords and Lunatics", all made up out of my own head, has been in my note-book a long time; a couple of years, probably.

A month ago, I picked up (as surrogates for the library I haven't been table to take on my travels) two volumes of the histories of Siena and Perugia. In which I found:

That between 1550 and 1552, the Holy Roman Emperor was building a fortress to overawe the inhabitants of Siena, perhaps borrowing the idea from Pope Paul III, who in 1540 had laid the foundations of a tremendous fort to overawe Perugia. The Emperor's castle (to give the non-vital parts of the story first) was torn down by the Sienese a few years after its completion; the Perugian stronghold, which contained punitive devices just like those in my citadel of Porli, survived until late in the 19th century.

But I was startled to find that during the building of the Sienese bastille, there appeared among the workmen a hermit named Brandano "clothed in sackcloth, a crucifix in one hand and a death's head in the other," urging the workmen not to aid in the oppression of their brethren, and prophesying doom for the ungodly structure if ever it should be finished. He tried to make his preachings practical by throwing two large stones at a man in a red coat, whom he imagined (because of his raiment) to be the Spanish governor; he was arrested, but "because of the governor's fear of the supernatural" was released on condition that he left the city.

The fortress was, in fact, completed in record time; and overwhelmed, with heavy casualties to its defenders, almost before the mortar can have been dry in its thick walls.

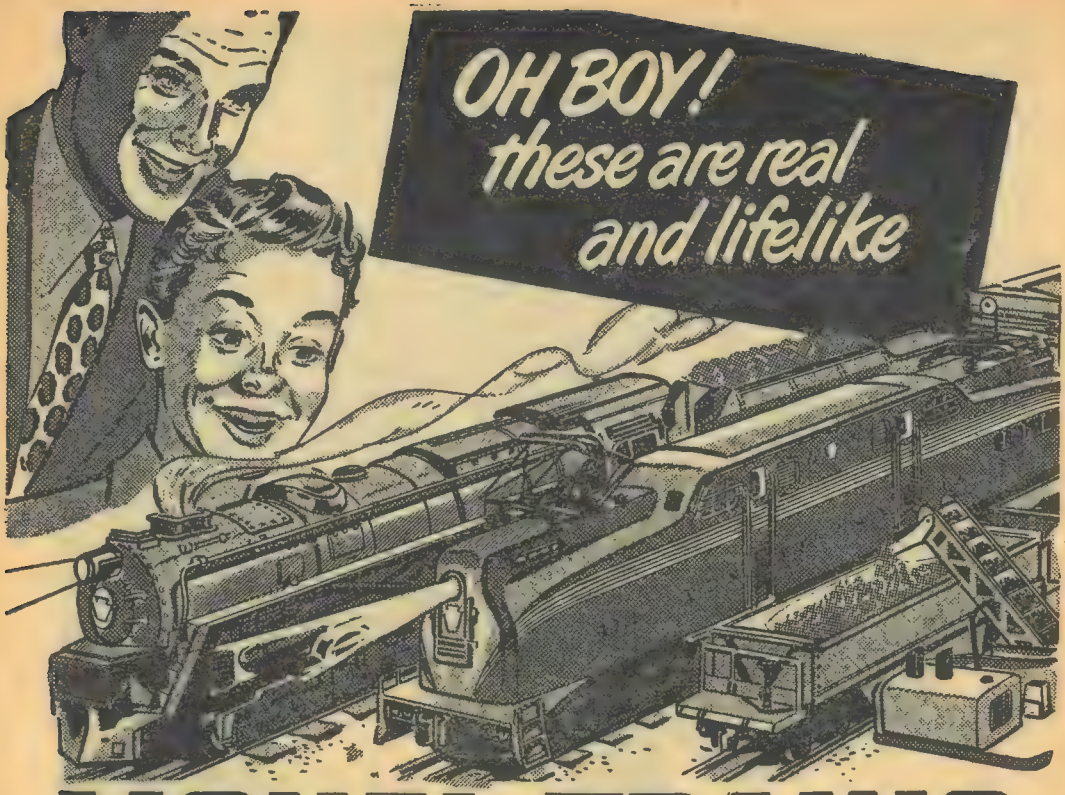
As if this coincidence between fact and fiction were not enough, I find that when, in Perugia in 1859, Swiss troops perpetrated the last non-Nazi large-scale massacre of civilized Europeans, a priest fired at the drum-major, assuming from his gorgeous apparel that he must be commander of the forces. Times having changed in the preceding three hundred years he, however was not pardoned and banished as Fra Brandano had been; instead he was shot in the public square next morning.

While I believe that in most respects the sixteenth century was much more civilized than the nineteenth (I say nothing about the twentieth)—candor compels me to admit that Brandano's case was exceptional. In the age of tyrants, the wandering friars, with no property to lose and Heaven to gain, were the only champions of the common man, and many of them—witness Savonarola and the preacher Foiano—died of it. The priest at Perugia was a noble survivor; as the Swiss mercenaries who killed him were ignoble survivals of another age.

In their early history, the Swiss were magnificent fighters for their liberties; nowadays, they are unsurpassed in the world for respectability, watch-making and the keeping of hotels. But as even the dispassionate Baedeker remarks in his handbook on Switzerland, "At the beginning of the 16th century a period of decline set in. The enormous booty of the Burgundian war had begotten a taste for wealth and luxury; the demoralizing practice of serving as mercenary troops in foreign lands began to prevail and a foundation was laid for the reproachful proverb 'Pas d'argent, pas de Suisses'." The fact is that, armed to the teeth, notably with the poleaxes still to be seen in the Castle of Chillon, the Helvetians were the most brutal, unscrupulous mercenaries in Europe.

I hear General Franco's Moors may furnish strong competition; but, owing to the tighter censorship of today, the full story of their deeds has not so far become history.

WE'VE just space enough left to mention a new book we think you'd enjoy—"Phantom Caravel" (*Bruce Humphries, Inc. Boston*)—a collection of lusty yarns of the Great Lakes by R. A. Emberg, whose name has appeared often in this magazine in recent years. Some of the stories—including the one from which Mr. Emberg's book takes its name—were first printed in *Adventure*. They cover a little-known and exciting segment of American history.—K.S.W.



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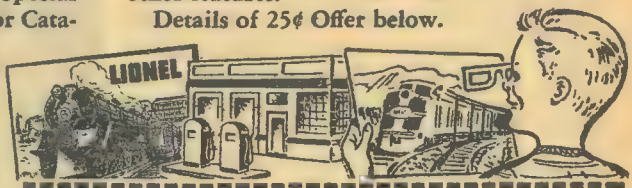

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SEVEN PADLOCKS TO HELL

By WILLIAM O'SULLIVAN

WE WERE all sitting there hating Joey Halley extra hard—and that was something; that was like trying to think up some new insults for a B-24—when this new pilot came clacking his heels through the hangar.

He was big. Bigger than Big Okey, he was, even. Martha had phoned over from Ops that he was on his way; but even without that, you'd have known he was a pilot. You'd have known he was a new member of Operation Snafu, too. A new Gentleman From Hell. . . .

His mouth was too tight, squeezing lines into his tanned cheeks, and squirting a shadow into his eyes rather than about his eyes. The sort of shadows you

The doctors dropped away, feet first, and were lost in the swirling snow.

see when you are flying over water and the sun is in front of you, and you look down and back and see it. The sort of shadow you make yourself. That's what the new man had in his eyes. Like all the rest of us there. Like me, and Dago Minetti, and Pat O'Dee, and Turk Drago, and Ike Destrell, and Big Okey. Airline pilots flying in the shadows.

He came over to the corner we had set up, as Operation Snafu's "ready-room." This was a beat-up sofa, four-five chairs, a desk, a telephone—the "slots" variety, naturally; we worked for Joey Halley, of Halley Airways, remember—and us.

We were all of us sweating out suspensions. Airline pilots who had some-

ILLUSTRATED BY
MONROE EISENBERG

thing go wrong. We were six pilots who formerly worked for six different airlines. All we had in common was, we knew we wouldn't be working for Halley Airways long. And we hated Joey Halley. Yes, that's right, The Great Halley, Pioneer-Airman Halley, Nobody-Like-Him Halley, Joey Halley.

They called us various things, the other fly-boys. They called us Halley's Serfs. They called us The Doghouse Gang. They called us The Gentlemen From Hell, Halley's Bad Boys, Halley's Remittance Men. We called ourselves Operation Snafu.

But if you wanted to hear some fancy name-calling, you should have been around when we were telling Joey Halley off, either to his ugly, expressionless puss, or just among ourselves. Like now. . . .

We looked up from our occupation with it when this new *peelot* came through the small door in the huge portal, and his heels sounded like hammer-strokes on the gong of conscience, now that Trip Thirteen wasn't there—squatted like a brooding vulture waiting for a feast of gore.

"Which one is Vorsanger?" the new jerk asked, his gray-green eyes being very unfriendly. He'd heard things about us, and now he was one of us, and he wasn't liking it, his eyes said. Nor were we liking him with our eyes. "I was told to see Cranny Vorsanger. The wolf-call in the Ops office told me he'd be here. By the way, who is she?"

I admitted I was Vorsanger, and waited for an eye-flicker that would bring me up and working on him. I was still sort of sensative about . . . That Thing. My reason for being here at all.

"Come back tomorrow," I told him. "I'll give you a check-ride at Zero-Nine-Hundred." I didn't bite on his question about Martha.

"Oh, you will!" he glared, not knowing this was standard reaction. We'd all done it, from me down to Ike Destrell. And like all us before him, he wasn't liking it. But like all us before him, he was suddenly remembering, "Gee, this is it, this is my job, this is my last contact with Flying!"

He batted his eyes away and you could see his Adam's-apple working his tie-knot when he swallowed. He changed his voice a lot, in tone, and in interest. "Oh! You will . . .? Uh, where's a good place to sleep?"

Big Okey, who had never taken his dark eyes from the man, said, "A bed."

THE new guy looked squarely at Big Okey, his eyes weighing him, measuring the breadth of him, contemplating the pleasant and frank hatred with which Big Okey looked back at him. He licked his lips and looked back at me.

"Where's a good place to eat?" he tried it again.

"A restaurant," Turk Drago snapped, his blue eyes savage.

The new guy looked at Drago now, and the way a muscle in his jaw twitched, you knew he thought Turk Drago was more his dish. He opened his mouth to say something, and then he looked at Big Okey, and he shut his mouth again.

"Shut the door after you," I suggested, "and don't be late."

The new jerk added my size up and liked things a lot better. "I'd heard things about this outfit," he said, his voice bristling back at me. "I guess they're right, the things I heard."

Nobody said anything. We just sat there looking back up at him. He represented all we'd lost, and all we hated, and all we would have given our scalps to get back: the fly-boys of the major airlines. After a minute, he turned to go; but he held it to say, over a meaty, power-packed shoulder, "Like I heard, this is sure a screwball outfit! I come in here and ask a few civil questions, and get my water cut off for me. I try to talk with Joey Halley, but all he has time for is to push a bunch of new locks around his desk—eight new locks with keys wired to 'em—and stare at them as if they were bad news from the Civil Aeronautics Board! I—"

Big Okey blinked, stared, and got up. "Seven locks."

The new guy squinted his gaze onto Okey. "Eight locks. Not that it is important, seven or eight. But there were eight locks."

The silence became grim, while we

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Gentlemen From Hell, while we pilots of Operation Snafu, took it in. And gloomy as the big hangar had seemed when Trip Thirteen had squatted there on its 17-ply tires . . . . waiting, waiting, waiting! . . . It seemed gloomier now without the bloodthirsty old bucket-of-bolts.

It was Pat O'Dee who said, "It's plenty important about how many new locks you saw. New, they were, and all alike, and all with two keys wired to them?"

"Yeah." The new man remembered with his eyes, twisting his head to look as if through the near wall back toward Halley Airways Operations. "Just like that. And—eight of them."

"Hold it," I said. I got my feet off the desk and stood on them. "You made a mistake, fella." I looked at the others. "Get it? The six of us here, excepting this new man: me, Dago Minetti, Okey, Ike Destrell, Turk Drago, Pat O'Dee. That's six. Add Jake, and add Martha Zanko. That's eight. One of them was used, as we all know. That leaves seven." I looked at the man. "Seven, you saw."

"Think!" Big Okey growled. "Think hard and straight! A life is wrapped up in this thing. *Was* wrapped up in it, I mean. A man's life, fellow. Think! Think hard!"

We stood there breathless in the gloom of the hangar, in the newer and deeper gloom that had settled over the place when Trip Thirteen had waddled its ugly way out of the hangar for the last time. Headed for its blood-bath.

The new man blinked, stared around at us until he saw we were in earnest, and he half closed his eyes to bring the dirty scarred and yellow top of Joey Halley's desk before him again.

We watched him tick off the count as his mind's-eye reproduced it for him, one of his blunt fingers stabbing their positions on that desk back there in Operations, as only a pilot's photographic-eye could memorize such details.

Years of scanning dials, of taking in the particular threat of a yellow-cored bank of cumulo-nimbus; while mentally computing fuel-gauges that were getting dangerously low; while recalling details of weather-symbols on the dispatcher's weather-section of the Clearance; of recalling the length, width, condition of an unseen runway below; of recalling the layout of the radio-range station in a storm-lashed terrain of mountains and valleys below, together with all the details of the tricky let-down . . . so that the Let-Down Procedure Book that the co-driver carried open at the right page, on his lap, was not necessary.

That sort of stuff will condition a pilot's memory so that he can tell you, without knowing how he does it, how many toothpicks are in the glass bowl on a table; or how many lumps of sugar in a bowl; or how many planes are on a parking-area line. Or—

How many locks, complete with two keys each lock, were on the desk of tough, rough, hard-boiled Joey Halley, as he sat breaking his heart on them, in the Operations Office of Halley Airways, the doghouse of the air business! It was important! It was *so* important!

"One, two, three, four," the new man counted with his thumb ticking off the calloused and blunt tips of his right fingers. He added the thumb in a typical gear-up hook. "Five. Six, seven," he held up the index and middle fingers of his left hand.

We waited breathlessly, our eyes hard on the man, our lips parted slightly. We were even beginning to relax a little, letting our lips grin, our breaths come out in sighs.

"Eight," the new man said, emphatically. "Eight locks. I can't be wrong. I can't miss on a thing like that."

I snarled, "And I can't, on a thing like this!"

I struck for his jaw, hard and with everything I could pack into it. I hit him again, and again, and he went down and rolled over and tried to get up, clear of me, but I was on him again.

This time, I felt my knuckles flatten in my right fist, and a flash of pain shot up my arm and into my shoulder, sickening me. This time, the new man stayed down.

Well, so what, he had his hands up, didn't he? Both of them. Another thing—he didn't have to come there, in the first place! Why didn't he stay where

he was? Why did he have to go and do what he did, whatever that was, to get fired, or suspended by CAB, or whatever it was? Now he had ruined everything!

"Come on," I said to the others. "Let's go see Joey. We got to, you know. This jerk will be all right, he's only knocked out."

I waited for them, the thing growing on me and killing me. . .

CHAPTER II

SWEATING IT OUT

I'D COME to Halley Airways straight from an epic of foolishness, direct from as perfect a case of "head-up-and-locked" as ever will be written in the rippling, red exhaust flame of a cut-and-dried night flight.

I was browned-off about things in general, at the time. My love-life was mixed when my girl-friend up and married an insurance man, of all people! We were going to be married, when I got enough dough. When I'd saved enough. But Clara said the more I got, the more I wanted, and goodbye, now!

Then the apartment house I had a rented room in burned down with all my stuff.

An "investment" I made in Wall Street turned out to be no investment at all.

And the Line lifted my co-driver just when I'd got the lug broken in like I wanted him, and they gave me as big a dope as ever I'd seen, for that New York-Miami—with a stop-off at Richmond—trip of Federated Airlines.

The new jerk was too eager. On take-off, I leaned over and told him to close the flaps some, because the old bucket was vibrating too much. Just a little too much. Instead of squirting the toggles on the engine-cowl flaps a few times, the zany dumped my wing-flaps for me.

I had to go through the gate with the Power, and we just did manage to hold Betsy from licking the runway with her props, the gear being just about retracted when my dope pulled the boner.

I told the eager co-driver to make his own reports, run the ship, keep his flight-log, and to wake me up over the Dawn fanmarker, north of Richmond. I had to run his check-in as we went over the Metuchen fan-marker. He'd never fly with me again!

Dah-dah-dah, the radio beacon below crooned to us. *Dah-dah-dah.* The panel-flasher winked a ruby eye at us three times, and again three times, and again three times . . . I had to yell at him to report in before he did. But when he did, it was O. K. It was routine.

"Federated Trip Three-Ten, cruising at four-thousand, over Metuchen fan-marker. Estimated time arrival, Richmond, Eighteen o'clock, twenty-two minutes. Trip Three-ten, over and out. . . ."

I had to yell at him again when he forgot to swing over to Washington Control two minutes south of the Boothwyn marker, out of Philadelphia.

When he raised the *dah-dah-dah-dah* of the Dawn marker north of Richmond, I instantly slapped the hood on and gave him an Instrument let-down, and he sure stunk! I took over and straightened him out and greased it in. And Richmond held us more than an hour because of bad weather at Raleigh. I wasn't landing at Raleigh, I kept telling them. But they held me. And held me. For something to do, I listened to the Boston weather-report, in the other direction.

It was ice all over the place, up there. Listening, I figured about what the conditions were—it used to be my old run—and how I'd handle it getting in. Finally, Richmond Radio cleared me, and with orders to my boob to shut his face and mind his own business and I'd mind mine, I took off.

Pretty soon, iced-antenna trouble took over, and you just couldn't hear a thing. I flew the route from memory, guesswork and luck, with an occasional screwy break-through down close to the shoreline to check my position with relation to the ocean.

Twice, Boob tried to talk to me. I told him off, and got him shut up. This job required concentration, and was a welcome escape!

The landing was a thing of beauty,

with sleet and snow and hail blinding out the runway lights after I'd worked a minor miracle and made a safe let-down to the dangerously low altitude of about fifty feet, smack over the harbor, and straight in from due south.

It was beautiful, and it took my mind off my troubles.

But it was also Boston, and I was supposed to be landing in Miami. The passengers were sort of disagreeable about it all; but the Line. . . .! They said some things, and I said some better things back, and—then someone said Joey Halley, the old airline polit, had a wildcat outfit that maybe I could work for. For a little while.

I didn't even appeal it. I walked out and found Halley and became a Gentleman From Hell.

JUST for a few months, it was to be. About a few months it would take me to swallow my pride and recant to Federated, and Federated would take the blackball-listing off my name with the other lines.

Joey Halley, blocky and hard-faced and with a perfect record with the Lines, was pursuing some private "bug" of his own, and it was none of my business what was eating the old goat if he had planes to fly and I could fly them. For just a few months.

Well, he had something to fly. I guess you could classify them as Aircraft. Anyway, they used to be Aircraft, but they had taken an ungodly beating and Halley had come by them cheap, and he was doing a land-office business of cargo and passenger-work that the Lines couldn't or wouldn't touch.

Some of it was border-line operation. The better stuff was. The balance of it was sheer idiocy and suicide. The overloads we carried in cargo would have made even Bill Harder happy if they had been on the Hump Run out of Chaboua for Chungking.

The better stuff was carrying hordes of Puerto Ricans between Newark and San Juan, via Miami. No plush-and-polish stuff, mind you. The old bench-like bucket seats, the baggage piled in the middle, and Puerto Ricans jammed hip-to-hip up and down the lengths of the seats.

The rugged stuff consisted of taking over cargo that would be delayed on the Lines, or by train, or by truck, because of weather, and working it in where it was needed. By low cunning. . . .

Halley's favorite trick was this:

Let's say some oil company wanted to get heavy equipment in a rush to the Tulsa area. There was a blizzard, and cargo was piled up. Trucks were delayed. You know what the winter was!

Well, we'd take the cargo—an overload, anyway—and we'd clear for New Orleans, or some place that was open. But en route, we'd change our flight-plan, as we could, being a *chattered* cargo operation, and we'd just fly into the Tulsa area when even the birds were walking.

We'd squat where we could, and refuel, and keep making passes at the field until we could break it out of the cover, and—there we were. Presto-chango! Only, Joey Halley got the major part of the chango, and if we didn't like it, why didn't we go fly elsewhere?

The old airline stuff of seventy-hours-flying—with bonus for more, in emergency; and strict we-quit-now rules when the time-limit was reached—was forgotten. So was bonus-dough for instrument flying, as we'd always got.

We always flew. Bad weather was our usual state of affairs. Actually, we did little flying in good weather. Desperation was our lot. Desperate for re-instatement with our old Lines, desperate to get through with Halley Airways and desperate for sleep, usually.

I thought I was a pretty good fly-boy when I left Federated. I thought I knew what a good pilot was. And then I flew with Joey Halley. . . .

Joey's skill and technique started where Super left off. He was so smooth that you didn't even resent it, like you might if a guy was a little better than you were.

But he was a chisler from here to there. Always looking for that extra penny. It was the one flaw in his make-up, and it was a spoiler for all the rest of him. With some people, saving money is a virtue. With others, a necessity.

With Joey Halley, it was all he lived and breathed and worked for. But why? *Why?*

It was chiseling, it was greed, that was offensive, indecent, even! Actually, if you didn't watch it, you'd be short a fiver or a tenner of your pay. If you busted something—carelessly, in taxi-ing, —you repaired it, and you paid for it.

If you didn't like it? "O. K., go find yourself a job."

In time, we came to hate him, and it wasn't a long time in coming to it, either. It was our common bond. That, and our need for the job, and our wonder about things with Joey Halley.

"What makes him this way?" was our steady wonder about him. "How does a man get to be like this?"

Our other wonder—and common bond —was Martha. Martha was Martha Zanko, who was Halley's bookkeeper, office-manager, secretary, and—when we got a cushy charter-job like flying a bunch of sports to the Derby, or to a Bowl football-game, or such—Martha Zanko went along as stewardess.

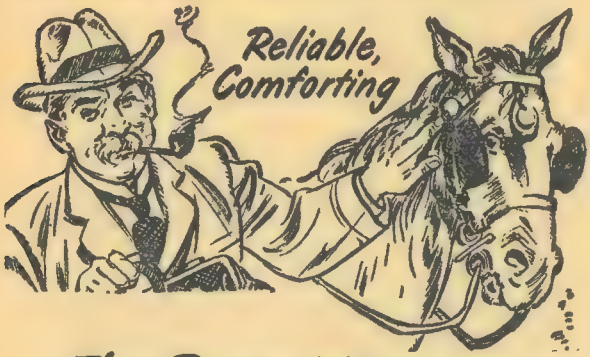
You've seen our cute airline hostesses? Half of them could walk onto a stage and take front-row in any chorus in musical-comedy work? And the other half could understudy them?

Well, Martha could take the star-lead in those same comedies.

Maratha was from some Southern-European mixture or other, and she was living proof that beauty has no nationality. Dark, she was, and ripe like a fruit, but glistening. Positively glistening! Her eyes were shiny-black. Her skin was was shiny-white, like marble. Her lips were shiny-red. Her teeth, her nails—everything but her temperament. Her temperament matched her favorite perfume: Musk.

By disposition, Martha was quiet and dark, like the somber, dimly-lit corner of some *seraglio,* a harem. And don't ask me how I know, if I've never been in a harem. I knew Martha, didn't I? All right.

We gathered Martha had been breaking in as a hostess with TSA when Joey Halley was winding up as chief-pilot



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with TSA. Joey had never had "trouble," like the rest of us. Like Big Okey and Ike Destrell and Turk Drago and Pat O'Dee and Dago Minetti and me. Joey had just come to a place where there was no more dough to be made. He left TSA and started Halley Airways. Martha left to go with him.

Figure your own reasons. I figured, too. But since I was the first Gentleman From Hell to join up with Joey Halley, and since I got to be around Martha a lot, and since she had pasted me a couple of good ones, and since I figured pretty safely that I could beat Joey Halley's time on the ground, if not in the air—I was puzzled.

I stayed puzzled, a long time, too—about Martha. But it was Martha who tipped me off about Joey.

"He has a young brother," Martha said, one day, when I was talking it up with Big Okey and with Dago Minetti, as to what was wrong with Joey, and she was listening. "Much, much younger. He is building all this for him. Perhaps you knew him? He, too, flew with the Army ATC. In India, also, I believe."

I'D RUN into a guy named Hanley once, who was in some trouble. But I didn't know any Halleys. Besides, this Hanley was about my own age, and Joey was fifteen years older, at least. Joey was anyway forty or forty-two.

This Hanley I'd run into had red-x'ed a Baker-Two-Four at Chaboua, for what he'd written up as a tail-flutter. And not Black Bob Becker, Bill Harder, Clay Royce, or anyone, could curse, talk, threaten or beg him to take it off the red-x and fly it; and we couldn't because it was out of Karachi, and not our ship.

I never did know how it turned out. The B-24 squatted there, forgotten, long after I'd left for State-side again, long after Hanley had disappeared in the general direction of Calcutta. I used to hear about it from the old gang, when we'd be fanning.

"Say! Remember that B-24, that Liberator? It's still drowsing in the rain. . . Wonder what happened to that Hanley guy?"

But I didn't know any Halleys, and if it was a relative of Joey Halley's, I didn't want to know any.

"Why don't he have pictures of the guy around?" I was puzzled. "Why don't he ever speak of him?"

Martha shrugged her shapely shoulders, and I lost interest in the subject. I mean, the subject of Joey Halley's brother, that Martha said all this chiseling and penny-pinching and slave-driving was about. If Martha would merely yawn, we'd all come to attention.

Ike Destrell was there, anyway. Ike was finding out what we had all of us found out—Joey Halley excepted, because we didn't know how to figure Joey and Martha—about the gal. "No dice!"

Martha was a dish, and how! She knew it, and she knew we knew it, and she even knew we knew she knew it, if—ohhhh, skip it, you'd have had to see Martha and live and breath—and suffer!— near her, to realize what I mean.

It wasn't that one look at Martha made me forget about Clara marrying the insurance man. One look at Martha and I didn't care a damn about Clara and the insurance man!

How old was Martha? Ummm, what did it matter? Martha was ageless. Martha was Woman. Martha was—Martha.

I was off on a co-pilot job with Big Okey when the picture started to clarify, to develope like a troublesome negative that you try and try to develop, and then—suddenly, there it is!

The co-pilot job was another of Joey Halley's tricks of low cunning in his tireless pursuit of profits; and in his tireless game of wringing us out like we were lemon-skins that might maybe give just a little more juice.

We were to deliver some Puerto Ricans to San Juan; pick up an in-bound gang to deliver back; and then take an overload of mine de-watering machinery out to Colorado. Bloop, bloop, bloop. Just like that. The trick about this latter job was, it had to be landed on a strip at 7,002-feet sea-level reckoning. That meant we flew it into a landing and hoped the brakes held.

I got a laugh out of it because that was what Big Okey was sweating out:

he'd laid a Trans-Nation liner into Tampa Bay when he let the TN-Maintenance talk him into going ahead with weak brakes instead of dumping the cattle—passengers, to you—out at Ops, and slamming Betsy into the barn for some work.

"I can't do it," Big Okey protested. "No passengers. Only cargo, for a year. That was what CAB ordered, remember?"

"You'll be co-pilot," Halley said, to Big Okey.

"Huh?" I asked. "I'm to pilot all the way to San Juan, and back, while this monkey sleeps? For the co-pilot dough you pay?"

"Of course not. Let your co-pilot fly it half the time. Only, he can't log it. Coming back. . . .? Well—he can give you a line-check. Observe you. Then he can fly the de-watering machinery as pilot, and you can log co-driver time. Get going, boys. Delays cost money. I have a lot of work back-logged for all of us. Get going! And be extra careful. I'm only renting these C-47's, you know, and I haven't worked this one my full month, yet. But I've paid for my full month."

"After that, we can bust our, ah, bunions, huh?" I snarled.

We made it to San Juan in one day. We made it back through the corner of a hurricane the next day. We were in Colorado the third day. We got home the night of the fourth day. That was unusual? Hell, man—that was Operation Snafu!

"He's here," Martha murmered, as we checked in. "Joey's brother."

I looked and saw the new guy. Hell, it was Hanley from Chaboua!

Even in his hound's-tooth jacket, his black silk shirt, his hand-painted sunburst tie, his chocolate slacks, and his jodhpur-type boots, I knew him. Big and blonde and quietly breezy, and snotty looking. He was the type who can change from sweat-wrinkled o. d.-cottons to Joe Brooks' Best and look the same. The tops.

Just then Joey came hustling out of his cubby of an office and for a minute, I didn't know him. He was smiling a yard wide, and his eyes were a million-candlepower when they looked at "Hanley from Chaboua."

He slid an arm around the big blond's shoulders and said, "Your Cadillac is on the way over, kid. Be sure and gripe if it isn't just what you want. O. K., now, kid, I want you to meet the other two boys. Your new gang, Jake. And I know they'll give it to you the same way they have been giving it to me!"

I had an impulse to say something about Chaboua but that business of *your new gang,* to this man, got me. So-ho! A new boss-man for The Gentlemen From Hell, and this was it!

I'm no dirtier than the next guy. I kept that Chaboua deal strictly to myself. Maybe—just maybe!—it would prove more useful later on. . . . Maybe I wouldn't have to sweat so hard.

CHAPTER III

THE NEW TOP-DOG

THE next day, Jake Halley was waiting when Okey and I came out to run a cargo of perishable fruits to Presque Isle, Maine.

"Relax, Okenham," he told Big Okey. "I'm starting with Vorsanger to ride 'checks' with all you lads." He got a cigarette going, standing under the wing of the old C-47. "You pretty familiar with Presque Isle, Vorsanger?"

"Not very," I said innocently. "I've only been in there a hundred times, so I've never seen the ground yet. However, as I recall it, the call-letters are ZQ; the radio range is on a frequency of 388-kilocycles; Tower is 388-278; airport elevation is five-hundred seventeen feet; initial-approach is three thousand feet, with sixty-five hundred feet emergency-altitude; final approach is two thousand; minny-altitude is one thousand; and they got a runway-localizer operating on 365-kilocycles, and the field is three and nine-tenths miles from the localizer."

"Ver-ry funny," Jake Halley said. "Ver-ry, ver-ry funny! I suppose you were memorizing all that when you went to Boston, instead of to Miami. I better warn you now that I'm a bit more exacting than my brother."

"Meaning the Cadillac?" I drawled. "That's more than I've seen Joey exact, as you call it, out of his profits, in the close to two years I've been with him. However, that's none of my business. Which seat do I ride, sir-r?"

"The left," he growled. "And mind your own business, wise guy!"

Big Okey, who had been watching him closely all this time, asked, "How does Martha like the Caddy, Little Brother? I hope she likes it, because I helped buy her that ride she got in it last night. Me and Cranny, here, and the rest of us. I saw you two pulling into The Black Cat out on Pike Eleven when I was leaving, last night. Big Brother sure takes care of you, doesn't he, Little Brother? Ummm, yes!"

I hadn't noticed, until then, the dark circles under Jake Halley's eyes, and the night-light pallor of him; and I don't mean airway night-lights. Halley's young brother whirled on Okey and blared, "You like your job here, Big Boy?"

"Not especially," Okey laughed softly, his eyes taunting him. "Why? You gonna get me fired? Better ask Big Brother first . . . *kid.* Or do you want to make something of it, in some other way?"

Jake Halley swung away and started checking the running-gear, his eyes angry. "For a guy who can't stop a plane short of a bath in a bay," he mused, as he eyed the rubber for cuts, "you got a lot to say. Oh, don't be surprised, I've looked all of you up. Dago Minetti, who yanked a gust-lock onto a DC-6 while the chief pilot was giving a co-driver a line-check—and turned the clunker upside down with forty-nine passengers rattling around like human dice, inside. Ike Destrell, who landed at Jacksonville with his gear up. Pat O'Dee, who left one—and nine passengers—on a mountain east of Burbank. Turk Drago, who wiggled his thumb for the co-driver to lock his throttles at Chicago, on take-off; and the kid dumped the gear, instead. I know all of you!"

I winked at Big Okey and said, "Well, it wasn't a tail-flutter, was it, kid? Huh?"

He didn't notice, at first; and then he came up, his eyes ugly, his face whiter than before. He opened his mouth to say something, and shut it again. Big Okey looked puzzled, but I just waited for Jake Halley, my face nicely innocent.

Then it happened.

Halley got the loading-manifest out, took one look, and yelled bloody murder.

"This beat-up stinker is two tons overloaded!" he yelled. "Who is responsible for this?"

"Not me," I told him. "I hate fruit. I wouldn't think of taking along two tons extra for a snack on the way. Listen, Jake—get wise to yourself! Who do you think is responsible?"

He stared at us both, then, stupefied. The answer came to him hard, and he started for the Ops shed. Okey and I followed along after him.

"What's the tail-flutter business?" Okey asked. "Give!"

"Oh, just a joke of mine," I laughed it off. "You know how it is we used to say, if a clunker has a tail-flutter, bail out? Just a joke of mine. Gee, I wonder what he's going to say to Joey? Evidently he doesn't know Joey starts operations where the regulations cease. This should be rich!"

It wasn't so rich. It was embarrassing.

Jake Halley sounded off about overloads in front of Martha and me and Big Okey and Ike Destrell; and Joey got red in the face and hemmed and hawed and tried to shush him. But Little Brother Halley kept on.

"This—this is disgraceful," he said, with fine indignation. "Just disgraceful! What's it get you, doing things like this, Joey?"

Joey took his elbow and led him into his office and shut the door, which was about as useful for maintaining silence as sticking your little finger into the exhaust stack of an A-26's R-2800s.

"It's getting me business, Jake," Joey said tightly. "And don't ask me what *that* gets me, because the answer is—nothing! But I don't have to remind you what it gets you, has got you, all your life. You don't remember Mom, Jake. You couldn't, of course. She died when you were born. You don't remember Pop, either, Jake. He didn't last long after that. But I promised him I'd look after you. I left college to do it. I've been doing it ever since. I am not complaining. But—well, don't ask me what I

think I'm doing, I *know* what I'm doing. What do you think you're doing? That's the question. Making a fool out of me in front of my own outfit? Squawking, because I happen to be pulling an overload? Well—it's bought you lots of time, kid. Lots of time, and in all the big stuff, too! For what? So you could get to take over the gang and handle them right. This may not be a plush airline; but it's a living, kid, and a darned good one. You should know! But . . . O. K., stand aside, I'll take your place for this ride."

"What are you talking about?" we heard Jake Halley snap. "Who has to ride? Let Vorsanger go with that big goat, Okenham."

I realized then that Joey, never having listened outside his own office, didn't know every word above a moderately low tone could be heard outside it. I looked at Martha.

She was managing to be very unaware of everything.

"You told Vorsanger you were going to check-ride him," Joey snapped. "Well, he's going to get a check-ride. By you, or by me. I can see you don't feel like it, so it'll be me. Stand aside."

"Like hell," we heard Jake bawl. And then there were the sounds of a struggle, of feet scuffing across the floor, or something banged into an echoing space, and a door slamming.

I remembered the small closet there in that office, then—for what few supplies Joey bought for Halley Airways. Someone was being pushed into it now, I figured. Locked in.

I WAS surprised when I heard Jake's voice, still loud, say, "If you'd only try for one of these war-surplus Liberators, like I asked you, I'd show you some flying, and some profits. And without over-loads, either! But not you, you're too cheap to get anything like that!"

"Thank God," I murmured, as the door opened and Jake Halley came walking out, pulling the door shut after him.

"Joey says for me to overlook the

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over-load this time," he said, looking at us there. "O. K., Vorsanger, let's go. Martha, honey?"

I stood looking out the window, not showing the shock that the "Martha honey" talk gave me. I heard Big Okey grunt; but Martha's voice was melting sugar when she said, "Yes, Jakey?"

"Tell them at the garage to try and work that scratch out of the right front fender, Martha honey," Jake Halley said, ignoring us as completely as if we had been furniture. "And when you drive it, hold it under fifty for a few hundred miles, anyway. I'll be back quick as I can make this check-ride and get it over with."

My head was spinning with the speed of this guy. One day at the place, and Martha The Unattainable was Martha-Honey. Yi and yipe, was my Casanova-stock in a spin!

I followed him, thinking Martha wasn't doing so bad, either. Not only did she go out with him in the snappy new Caddy convertible; but apparently, she was driving it when and as she pleased. So long as she kept it under fifty for a few hundred miles. And until Jake got back from Maine. The picture was developing fast!

I looked back in time to see Okey grinning and rubbing his hands together, and I knew what the big jerk was thinking!

Okey was thinking, "My, my, wait until I get my hands wrapped around the wheel of that Cadillac tonight."

For Okey never did give up thinking Martha liked a good time, and he never could see Joey Halley as a good time. Not that way. . . .

Then Joey Halley's voice was reaching calmly past my shoulder to Jake, and Joey was walking past me to Jake, and saying, smoothly, "I'll take it, Jake. You stay here, kid, and get acquainted with the routine and the paper-work. O. K.?"

The way he said it, Jake didn't argue. In fact, I caught what I realized was both surprise and relief in Jake Halley's good-looking face, and I figured it from there.

That door has a defective lock, and Joey made it out of the closet. Boy, I wish he hadn't! I'd really have given this mug a bit of hell! If he isn't a phoney, I never saw one.

I was remembering that Joey spoke of all the flying-time he had bought the guy, and I wondered why he'd had to. Unless Jake Halley just didn't care for the sort of flying you had to do when it was your living, and bought big-ship time at big-money prices.

I thought about the rest I had heard, too: of Jake being one of those long-years-after babies; and Joey, instead of being his brother, was more the boy's mother and father. I supposed a thing like that could work on a man until he tried to *be* mother and father and everything to a kid left alone so early in life.

Then I remembered I was one of the pawns in this game, and I got sort of hard about it again. "My sweat and blood, he is giving him," I saw it. "Mine and Okey's and Pat's, and the rest of us! Nerts, what's so sentimental about that?"

I figured it out about Martha, too—how it was Martha had left a good air-line job to slave away for Joey; and then, the minute the kid brother showed up, switched onto him so fast it had us would-be wolves looking and feeling very sour, indeed!

Joey couldn't have felt good about it, or about something. He really gave me a check-ride!

I was under the hood at take-off, and I was still under it when we brought up Presque Isle. Joey had me making timed climbs, timed descents, timed turns, single-engine drill, everything.

I was glad to get into the right-hand seat coming home; until he gave me a co-driver's check from Augusta Radio clear in to Newark again. Then he gave me a masked-dial let-down, in the dark.

"I'll tell Jake you're all right," he growled, when we landed. "Jake is new top-dog here, Cranny. He's Chief. I want you to work with him."

I nodded. I knew what he meant. He wanted me to take care of the jerk! That's why I'd been getting that thorough check-ride.

For the first time in my life, I felt sorry for Joey Halley.

I remembered, then, what I'd read about that shooting star that traveled the outer darkness of the firmament, pursued

by a fiery tail which it could never escape; and I had to grin. The name of that star condemned to an eternity of carrying excess-baggage for life was—Halley's Comet!

That, I figured, is what Jake Halley had been to his older brother Joey, for a long, long time: a fiery, troublesome, clinging appendage that followed in the wake of Joey's making. I began to see now why Joey Halley wanted money and more money. The kid wasn't a natural pilot, but he kept following after Joey; and it cost terrific dough to build up big-ship time on your own!

I got Okey and Turk Drago aside the next day and told them, "The new Chief is a phony-baloney. I got into the files when Martha stepped out to lunch, and saw the guy's flying-time records. His Army time ended at Chaboua. Since then, he has been buying DC time, and —get this—four-engine time in a DC-6! Who has been paying for it? I. You. Us. Through Joey. Now Joey has him here to take over, and the chump either can't or won't fly. Too used to letting Joey do everything for him."

Big Okey pointed to his bruised nose. "Martha has fallen for him, too. I got evidence. See?"

I shook my head. "Martha, under that lovely skin of hers, is a little fixation machine with only one reason for living: to salt her little hide down in comfort. Whether she figured Joey would tire of supporting Jake—of dragging his comet-tail after him—and switch his attention to her, or whether she figured all along she could take Joey by sinking her hooks into Jake, I don't know. But she has Jake, pals."

"Until Joey gets wise," Drago murmured.

"Nuts! Joey is so used to giving Jake Halley things that he will keep on giving! Sure. I figure Joey is in love with Martha. We all are, aren't we . . . the way you'd love a beautiful flower, or a beautiful savage, or a beautiful wild animal? Joey has given Jake his living, his flying-time, his clothes, his food, his automobiles. He's now giving him his Halley Airways. So . . . he will give him Martha, too. But don't you believe that stuff about Jake wanting a Liberator. I'm not guessing, I *know!* Just forget that stuff. That's only Jake's talk. You'll see I'm right."

That week, Joey and Jake left for Augusta and came back with a B-24. A Liberator. A Flying Bathtub. Joey had bought it for Jake!

CHAPTER IV

THE LOCK

I GRINNED when the hangar doors opened and the old clunker was jobbed in and shut down, and the hangar doors shut after it, and later Martha told me, her eyes troubled, "The new plane has a tail-flutter. So Jakey says." She eyed me quietly. "It cost a lot of money, even if it is old, and even if it is a war-surplus."

We spent a lot of time joking among ourselves about the old tub, christening it Trip Thirteen, and saying Jake ought to start the put-put—the gasoline engine, one-cylinder auxiliary battery-charger the bucket carried—and pretend he was flying it there in the hangar.

But we felt sorry for Joey, figuring the money he'd put out, and seeing Jake had no idea of flying it.

We felt sorrier for him when Jake was to go on a C-47 ride with some oil-equipment, took one look at the manifest, and hollered again. "Overload! This—this is terrible!"

They put on the office-scene again, Jake and Joey did, behind closed doors; and once again, we heard Joey get locked in; an once again we heard him simply pressure the lock open in time to catch Jake at the ship, and take his place.

That was the day I went to the hardware-supply place on the field and bought one strong, perfect, door-lock of the spring-type, that you couldn't work from inside, and that would hold.

"I think somebody has been stealing our supplies," I told Martha. "The other day when I wanted some Halley Airways writing-paper, well—there wasn't any. I figured you could get this put on that closet door in Joey's office?"

Martha looked at me with those woo-woo eyes and opened a drawer of her

desk to drop my lock in. I looked into the drawer and blinked. There was alreay another lock, just like mine, there. Someone else had thought of it, before me!

The next time I was near the hardware store, I asked who else had bought a lock? The answer nearly floored me. Martha Zanko had bought a lock.

"So!" I figured. "Martha is trying to figure the angles—whether to put the skids under Jake, or to wait and see will Jake straighten out. That dough going for Trip Thirteen must have almost killed her, if she has been figuring everything as hers for all this time!"

Pretty soon, the act with the closet-door in Joey's office got to be a ritual, sort of. Nearly every time Jake was due out on a trip, it happened.

Then one day Okey winked at me and said, "I bought a lock for that closet door! Martha is going to get it put on. Now, the guy will either fly steady, or quit."

"What a wonderful idea!" I deadpanned it. Turk Drago and Pat O'Dee had already bought locks for that door, too, I knew. "Well, it's good weather today. I bet you I get that check-ride from Jake."

Jake came along. "To observe," he said, casually.

I looked at the manifest and chuckled. We were five-hundred pounds under even conservative loading practice. I flew it because Jake said he didn't go for twin-operation. He liked four fans.

"The B-24 is my favorite ship," the jerk tried to tell me. "Big, comfortable seats, five radios, twenty-seven hundred gallons of fuel even without bomb-bay tanks, and steady like a hangar."

"Until you hit turbulence," I said. "Then they don't fly, they fall around. I used to push C-87's out of Chaboua." I let that sink in. "You know . . . ? Those 24's converted to carry cargo?"

He looked at me quickly; but he was game. "What serial number? Forty-ones, or forty-twos?"

I couldn't remember. The serial-numbers were on the rudders, of course; and also inside the plane, along the Dural-metal sides. "Who the hell cares what number is on the outside," I asked him, "when on the inside are numbers of barrels of high-octane; and cases of TNT; and cases of H-E; and Japs are trying to shoot you down if the weather over the Hump doesn't shake you apart! And the stinkers giving you just enough gas to get back, on the return trip . . . *if* you fly it straight and don't wander around trying to dodge storms!"

"It must have been rugged," he muttered. "I—my time was all on the 24's. I got to like them. My favorite ship. When they act right, I mean!"

I adjusted the elevator trim-tab, notched my throttles to synchronize the rhum-rhum-rhum out of the two churning props, and made a position-report over Nashville.

"Ever run into a guy named *Hanley?*" I asked, casually. "Like your name, in a way—without the two *l's?* H-a-n-l-e-y?"

JAKE HALLEY'S face was tragic when he tried to hold my eyes and couldn't. He shifted around, looking at this and that, and always springing his eyes back to mine for a new leap away. When he spoke, his voice was strained thin.

"I remember a guy of that name who got . . . court-martialed," he said, readily. "They got him on AW-95, for something or other."

I blinked at the tachometers. Article of War 95 meant mandatory Dishonorable Discharge. A guy, a pilot, who had one of those, had no more chance to fly for an airline, I knew, than Tojo would have of becoming President of the United States.

Suddenly, I felt like a heel. When you get right down to cases, people have no business flying. The Lord didn't intend they should, or our wings would be built-in, not riveted. I often found myself wondering what I was doing flying, when I'd hit a spot of really rugged going and break out to see the cozy lights in the house of some groundling, below my wings. Below and safe and warm and snug and his wife maybe sitting next to him by a fire, and if the radio didn't work he read a newspaper, he didn't just murder himself on some rocky peak.

I could figure Halley, Jake Halley,

with the wind up over that B-24 there at Chaboua, writing his name as *Halley* and having some grounded Gremlin in Ops thinking it was *Hanley,* and him getting called Hanley a lot, and disappearing, and taking the ship's papers with him.

They'd be a long time checking back to get him, I knew. They were a hell of a long time doing anything, in the Army, when they had all the records, and everything nice the way it should be.

I remembered "Georgia" Johnson landing a B-17 on a fence at Prestwick, Scotland, and taking all the papers and signing his own delivery-receipts and a year later, when they caught up with him, Georgia Johnson bouncing into a hospital with the laping-meemies and getting a psycho-reading that prevented his being responsible for Prestwick's permanent fence-decoration or anything else.

And I didn't see that Georgia Johnny —nor Hanley-Halley, either—was drawing a long bow: if you were not a psycho when you started flying, you didn't have to wait too long! If you stayed what people recognized as "normal," that just meant you were crazy to start with, or never did have really good sense, anyway.

I finished the trip very sorry for the guy, but still very goofed off with Joey for making us fly with a guy who was our boss and who couldn't fly for sour owl-feathers.

He'd decided he'd land the clunker back at Newark. He did a hobby-horse performance along the runway, bouncing and jittering, and I laughed real loud when he asked Tower for his time on the ground, and the comedian in the glass-house cracked, "You landed at Eleven-Zero-One — Eleven-Zero-Two — and Eleven-Zero-Three, old boy."

But I was burning mad when I heard later that he had written me up for foxing Memphis into letting me in when the field was socked-in by weather, and I pulled a mixture-control back into idle-cutoff so that even Memphis Tower could hear me back-firing, and yelled, "Mayday, Mayday! Emergency-landing, Memphis!"

Who did he think I'd learned that from, if not Brother Joey?

I sent out feelers to Federated and to Consolidated and to All-Nations Airlines, because I had no intention of helping to support a louse like Jake Halley.

Joey heard about it and really bore down on me, to get his money's worth out of my flat monthly-pay arrangement. He figured me for every flight he could. When I didn't so much as peep, he started making Jake go along to give me hood-time, and really sweat me out. No riding with George on, and dozing, or listening to dance-music on the liaison-set, or catching up on my reading.

Anyway, that meant good-weather flying, I figured, or Jake wouldn't go along. Eight of us had contributed locks to Martha's stock-pile of locks in her desk. Yes, *eight.*

Jake brought one in one day, and gave it to Martha while I was lying on the sofa by the coke-machine, a newspaper over my eyes, trying to sleep.

"Put this lock on that closet-door in my brother's office," he told Martha,

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loftily. "I'm tired of his interfering with me all the time."

So that made eight locks were there. Me, Turk, Pat, Ike, Dago, Okey, Martha—and now, Jake, himself. I lay very still and heard it clunk into the drawer, and heard the key turn in the drawer lock.

"Martha hasn't decided yet," I figured. "The day that jerk starts to fly regular, in all ships and in all weather, is the day he quits. Martha is figuring what her angle is if he quits. If Joey will keep on shelling out. If he stays and we quit—she knows Joey will be up against it. She can't figure does she want him to quit. When she does—bing! On goes that lock, and Jake will have to fly; or just plain quit cold in front of us all. He has too much pride to do that and stay. Martha hasn't got it doped out yet . . ."

IT WAS still that way when I got a cozy trip to San Juan with a load of cattle, and Jake, who had been drinking himself stiff a lot, lately, decided to come along to dry out.

He was shaky like a Scotsman's knees in a sudden freeze, and he slept a lot, and also he kept going back to the "head" a lot, and bringing the perfume of whiskey back with him. He'd arranged it so we didn't have any pay-load coming back . . .

On the way back, we stopped at Jax for fuel, and had word to call Ops at home. Immediate! Very important! I called, and the dope was:

"Pick up a package and four more passengers and drop them at Main City, Pennsylvania, on the way in. Never mind what or who! Just carry out orders. And . . . don't miss! Also, keep your mouths shut about this, you hear?"

The weather reports for Main City were ugly, and so was Jake. He looked over the four men who bustled aboard, all carrying some gear of their own, and he talked with them, and when he came back he snarled, "I wonder what Joey is up to now? Why is he so set on making every last nickel! I can't get a word out of those new men!"

The weather got worse as we hit north. It was a small-scale blizzard when we worked up Main City radio; and to my surprise, they told us to start making passes at them after saying the field was closed. This was really a set-up! Not snafu; not tarfu; but fubar!

It was close and risky, and three times I nearly made the letdown smack atop the radio-range station, pulling up each time to just miss the lighed antennae for another try, to make the mountain port.

Then Jake Halley, his eyes wild, took over.

"I'm boss!" he yelled. "We're going home, and fast, before this hits Newark! I'm flying it!"

He flew it, all right. He flew it right into Newark and rubbed the gear off in a cross-wind landing just as the field got completly socked in by a curtain of drifting snow feathers.

Joey, his face raging, met us when the meat-wagon trundled us in to Ops.

"You fool!" he screamed at me. "You blasted idiot! You didn't make it? You crazy lunatic, I told you you *had* to!"

I got him cooled off by telling him Jake was Boss-Man, and had taken over and stopped me.

Joey looked at his brother queerly. "Those men you brought in," he said, "are doctors. The package is serum! Main City has a raging epidemic of smallpox, and the third blizzard in a week has isolated the city! It has all been very hush-hush, on government orders! That's why they picked us, to make the try, instead of a regular airline outfit!" He looked at me suddenly. "You want to make the try, with me? We may have to parachute the doctors out, and the serum. We—we may not even get to come back. But—*it has to be done!* They relied on me, and I'm delivering!"

I nodded. "We got a 47 handy?"

"Nothing is here, now that you boys have wrecked this one! Nothing but the B-24! Everything else is out. Can you fly the Lib?"

I shrugged. "If I got to." I was doubtful; but what could I do?

"You got to! I'll pick it up after a little, maybe. I never saw the ship I couldn't fly, after a little! O.K. We'll trundle it out. Meet me in Ops in twenty minutes. I'm going after chutes!"

I knew this was It. *It!* But what could I do? The serum and the doctors had to

be got in there to Main City. I was a pilot. I had to take the bad with the good. This was bad. I hadn't been in a 24 in . . . four years. But I had to go in this one.

Jake Halley waited near while Joey and I were talking it over. How much fuel. How we'd fly it in. How we could safeguard the serum so it would drop by chute, if need be, and still get found. There was no point sending the doctors without the serum, even if they were specialists in fighting the disease.

I could picture Main City locked in and without fuel and so without lights, and kids and adults taking sick and dropping, and the ones who were left trying to keep going, and working to open the roads, or repair railroad tracks, and watching the snow-blanked skies for the help that maybe was never going to get there.

I was glad Newark was zero-zero. It made it easier saying good-bye to everything. But I was disgusted when Jake barged into Joey's office and started the old scene, all over again. The act. Martha must have been affected, too, for she slipped out from behind her counter and went to stand looking at where Trip Thirten was crouched in the dark, swirling shrouds of snow, her four engines growling in a warm-up as the grease-monkeys got everything ready.

The doctors were already aboard Thirteen, pale but resigned. Everything was ready, and as soon as the Act took place, we'd go.

I looked around again for Martha, but she wasn't there any more. I heard the usual talk inside—"No, damn it, I'm going! This is my job! You keep out of this!" Then the closet door banged, and the office-door opened, and Jake came out, and I followed after him.

We reached the apron. No Joey yet . . . We reached the ship. No Joey yet . . . I got in while Jake stopped, stared back at the curtain of snow, and then slowly followed me. I closed the bomb-bay doors with a growling clank of doom in their noisy rumble.

Jake waited some more, fiddling with the seat-strap, looking for this and that, locating the Radio Facility Chart and the Instrument Procedure Let-Down Manual.

"Waiting for Martha, or Joey?" I asked, nastily.

He never answered. He grabbed the throttles—I was sitting on the right, as co-driver—and goosed Three and Four alive to make a left-hand turn. I called them up at Tower and got a sober, "You're cleared and Number One to take off, old man. And . . . good luck to all of you."

"Trip Thirteen out," I said steadily, and clicked off. I nodded my head to Jake Halley.

"Eternity is ours, pal. Let's go and get it!"

CHAPTER V

HALLEY'S COMET

THE take-off had me weak waiting for something to come out of the soft, heavy snow and stop us with a crash and a flaming explosion.

After Jake had got the center of the runway, he checked over everything, and then poured the soup to her so fast the plane jerked forward and genuflected slightly on her nose-wheel strut. The airspeed-needle crawled to thirty, forty, fifty, sixty. Jake eased the trim-tab back a little, just a little, Seventy, seventy-five . . .

The nose-wheel came up, but the main-gear clung, and we roared along, hurling ourselves into the thick curtain of white.

Snow had pasted onto the hatches so we couldn't see, like blotting paper. I stood it all I could, and then I screamed, "Get it up, get it up!"

Jake snapped, "If she is going to fly, she'll get herself up! If she isn't, I don't want her up at all, do I?"

But he unlocked the super-charger setting-locks and went through the gates to fifty-six or -seven inches, and the old cow really bellowed. But she got up there all right.

I didn't know it until Jake reached over and jerked the gearlever up and watched the indicator-lights go from green to blank. The landing-lights, which he had turned on for take-off, drowsed off, fell away, and blanked out.

It was that dread thing of the air — a tail-flutter!

Jake worked the manifold-pressure back to 50.5; then back to 45-inches for his climb, nursing the props back to 2300 with the all-toggle control.

"Gimme a heading," he said, then. It was his first indication that he needed any help. "Gimme a heading, I can't look away from these dials or something will go wrong, sure!"

I gave him a heading.

"Give me an altitude that will miss everything!"

I told him eight thousand. That would skin the tops. He took ten-thousand instead.

Then the wonder of it started to hit me: this guy, who was afraid of his own shadow in a C-47, was flying the Liberator as if it were a Cub! As if he read my mind that easy, he said, "I told you this was my favorite ship." A slight grin etched his grim mouth. "I had over a hundred hours co-driver before my pilot checked me out in one. By that time, I knew it so well I didn't feel at home in anything else."

"Chaboua?" I suggested, gently. "Back on the old Hump Run?"

He got his 10,000 and cut to a fast cruise of 32-inches, 2050 rpm, and snicked the mixture to Full Lean, closed the cowl-flaps, squirted the oil-cooler shutters open a bit until the needles gave the red-lines breathing space, and

then yelled at me, "You fool, you want to rip the wing-flaps off? You didn't dump the flaps!"

I dumped them and repeated, "Chaboua . . . *Hanley?*"

He got a cigarette going, motioning me to hold the wheel, and said, "Tail-flutter. I was co-driver on The Flying Dutchman, as they got to calling it—the 24 we got out of over Florida one night, over the water, thinking the shadows of the moon through the broken clouds showed farm-lands. That clunker was shaking like a crazy shimmy-dancer. But it made it to Mexico, on George. That was a 41-Serial plane, too. Like the one I had at Chaboua. A 41-Serial. 41-42185, to be exact."

"You remember numbers that good?" I asked him.

"Wouldn't you, if they showed on every page of your court-martial transcript? You'll never know what that tail-flutter is, until you feel it. You'll never know. *Maybe.*"

I swallowed. "I suppose this is that same Chaboua plane?" I grinned. "That's too much, Jake. Just too much! Even for me."

"Look and see," he said.

I did. It wasn't the same number. This one ended in 044, on the Dural-metal inner skin, where it was stenciled every few yards. But it was a 41-Serial. The first two numbers were 41.

"We're safe," I sighed, dropping down and lighting up a smoke of my own. "We're O.K."

"It was starting a flutter when we drove it up from Augusta," Jake said. "Nothing that Joey noticed. But I did. I know I did. I know the symptoms. What causes it, I don't know. Nor did factory. Probably some slight fault in those early ones. Farm-hands and seamstresses and insurance men building the planes—"

"Insurance men," I said. "They're the ones. They foul everything up. I—" I held it there, and I started sniffing. "That's odd!"

"Gas fumes, you smell?" Jake asked, reaching to open a hatch.

"No," I said. "No. I could swear I smell that Oriental perfume. Musk. You know?"

We both realized she was there, at the same time, I think. Standing between the seats laterally, about a foot behind us.

It was Martha.

"Hel-lo," she said, casually. Just like that. "Hel-lo."

I asked her, "How did you get on here, Baby?"

She was looking at Jake, steadily, with a faint smile on her lips. But it was me she answered. "I saw you—one of you other pilots—had put that lock on Joey's closet-door. I knew how it would be. So . . . I came."

"She's in love with me," Jake Halley said, adjusting the automatic-pilot elevator setting slightly. "She didn't think she was, at first. But she is. She finally realized it."

He was as serious and as casual as if he had been saying that Number Three was heating up a bit. As it was. He cracked the oil-coolers a little wider on the right-inboard.

"Oh, sure," I said. "Yeah-yeah. Martha is in love, all right. With Martha. Get wise to yourself, Jake. I'm no buddy of yours, but someone ought to tell you the altitude."

He smiled slightly in the gloom of the cabin. "I know what you are thinking. You think Martha is playing an angle. She was, for a while. I think she even figured, for a time, she would pass me up and marry Joey. But Martha and I are a lot alike, in a way. Martha was born poor and scared; and I was born Joey's brother and scared. Right, Martha?"

The girl stood there looking down at him with that shining aura she wore about her all the time. She looked at him, a steady look, and then looked straight at me.

"You didn't put the lock on that door? I'm not mad about it, Cranny. I would have been, if I hadn't noticed it at the last minute. I mean, I wouldn't have got to come."

"Maybe I should have been locked in there with Joey," I growled. "This guy Jake needs me like he needs holes in his hydraulic-lines!"

Just then, four red flashes winked at us from the instrument-panel, as the Marker

Beacon checked in to work. *Dah-dah-dah-dah,* my head-set said. *Dah-dah-dah-dah.* Flash-flash-flash-flash. Flash-flash-flash-flash.

"East Liverpool Fan-marker," I sang out to Jake. "Take a heading of Five, Magnetic, and start to let down. I'll try to raise Main City radio. But the static will about kill it, with this snow beating the antenna."

"Reel out the cable and try Liaison," Jake said. "But get into your chute, first. No last minute racing-around, if things go wacky."

He flipped George off, I supposed for the let-down.

I got up and fell back into my seat. I fell back again. Martha seemed to be dancing a jig. I looked at Jake. His face was tight when he looked back at me. He nodded slowly.

It was that dread thing of the air—a tail-flutter! Jake had been right about it. Trip Thirteen had a flutter! If you can call it anything as mild and prosaic as a "flutter" when the deck of the plane is bucking like a ship at sea caught in a hurricane!

JAKE slowed it down, but the shaking got worse, and we started to pay off the rate-of-descent needle, and the landing-gear warning-horn started its ugly bellow and the panel warning-lights made a triangle of three red spots. Jake souped the throttles wider.

I made it back to the radio-compartment, and the smell of musk told me where Martha Zanko had hidden while we took off. I reeled out the antenna-cable fifty feet, a hundred, a hundred and fifty, and I snapped the set going, pulled the phones on my head and made the try.

"Main City radio, Main City radio! Halley Airways calling. Over! Main City radio, over!"

The roar of the four P & W's and the hiss of the wind through the near-by bomb-bays and the shake-shake-shake-shake of the big plane was all the answer I got. I switched over from voice to TWX and got the transmitter key to jiggling, racking my brain for the code, and getting it.

And hoping would someone read the thing.

"We're making the try on a procedure-letdown," I coded to Main City. "Set your siren off on Ops so the doctors can hear it when they land, if we must parachute them. Will slam a flare out with each drop. Halley Airways, over and out."

No answer. I reeled the cable in and worked my way forward again. Jake winked at me. Martha was in the right-hand seat. "My new co-driver!" he yelled. "Say, Cranny—we got to parachute them. I couldn't slow the bucket up enough for a landing, if it was CAVU. Look! We're barely making headway at one-eighty!"

I saw. Jake had put it back on George again.

"What's the deal now, get the saw-bones ready to jump?"

He nodded. "Right. And you, too. You tie the serum package to your belly. We can't risk it being busted, or lost. Besides, if we jettison it with a separate chute, we won't have enough to go around. Now that Martha is here, we'll need all the chutes. Beat it back and get them into their chutes, and up forward here. We'll jump them from just aft the step-up, here. And get that other chute, for Martha."

I went back, and what I saw brought me running forward again. I leaned over to tell Jake, quietly, "There's been a mistake. They forgot to put the chute on for the serum package like they should have."

He sat rock-still as the shaking would let him, as what I told him sank into his understanding.

We were short one parachute. We couldn't land the plane. We had to bail out. We were one chute short. They were twenty-four foot chutes, anyway, designed to carry 140-pounds at a too-fast speed, at best. If two tried to hang to one, there'd be two dead, instead of one. Suddenly, he looked very tired and very old.

"You'll go, Cranny," he said "You and Martha, of course. Now don't argue! There's nothing you can do for me by staying, anyway. Oh, sure, you're good—Cranny Vorsanger, one of the super-fly boys! But I'm the jerk that's needed

now, not you! Me! Me, Jake Halley! Halley of Chaboua. Halley the Stooge. I'm jettisoning you apes, and I'm bringing Trip Thirteen in on her belly. Somewhere!"

"No, Jake." I shook my head. "I'm sticking."

That's when I saw his gun. True Ferry-Commando style! He patted it. "I don't know who gave me this flight by putting the lock on that door. But I'm accepting it, accepting it with thanks if not with glee! Now, get going, or so help me God, I'll shoot you! I am captain of this ship!"

All the anger of our riding him was on him, now.

"One try," I asked him. I inched forward, hoping the crazy look in his eyes wouldn't set his trigger-finger pulling. "Just a try, Jake, to see for myself how it is?"

He nodded, and let me slide back into my seat. I took it off George, and the wheel pulled me forward and slapped me back. The rudder-pedals bucked my feet in a crazy dance off and on the bar. I braced my feet on the panel, and tried to hold it, my arms tight. Everything was double, the instruments, the hatches, the control-pedestal, everything, it shook me so.

His eyes vaguely hopeful for a moment, Jake Halley slid into his seat and braced his feet, tried to help. I saw it was no go. George could hold it better than we could, but—how long?

Jake got up and he got his gun and I nodded and started back. I dropped down to the put-put deck, by the vent to the nose-wheel housing, and stepped onto the cat-walk and started back to the rear compartment. I motioned the Docs into their chutes, and got the serum package, and led them forward, single-file, along the catwalk, the cold wind howling and tugging at us in the dark cavern of the bomb-bays.

Jake was at his seat again, staring at the radio-beacon flasher. It blipped on and held steady as we came over Main City radio.

Jake went into action, but fast. He jumped past me to yank the bomb-bay handle and the cold air rushed in as the bays yawned open again. He looked at the Docs, eyed his wrist so he could count the time over the field on his watch, and then jabbed his finger. At each jab I loosed a flare.

The doctors dropped away, feet first, and were lost in the swirling snow, hands clutching rip-cord rings, lips counting the time . . .

"Next time around, you go!" Jake yelled at Martha. "Give that old boob Joey my love, and—tell him, thanks for everything he did for me! I mean, in case I— You know?"

Martha picked up the spare chute and held it as if to get into it. She stepped down from the office-deck, and—

Dropped the parachute down into the swirling white void!

"Martha!" Jake yelled. "Martha, you little . . . angel!"

The girl came past me again and stood tip-toe to reach her arms around Jake's neck.

She kissed him, then. And I mean, *kissed* him! Even with everything the

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way it was, I could stand and envy the guy.

Then I moved to do my duty.

"Martha goes in my chute," I said. "I'm staying, Jake. You and me, boy. We'll bring it in. I—" I stopped, sniffing again. "Hey, that's really gas, this time, you lug!"

Jake started and yelled, "The vibration has snapped a line, maybe. Yep, there goes Number Three! Now we can't get the gear down anyway! We have no Auxiliary-Electric, and no time to crank it!"

Working fast, he goosed One, Two and Four up, to compensate when the fuel-pressure dropped to Zero on Number Three engine. Then, as if he was playing a pin-ball machine at The Black Cat, he coolly leaned forward to work the buttons and bring Trip Thirteen around in a procedure turn and back in a timed retrack over Main City airport.

He looked at Martha as the ship started back, at minimum altitude, and he came toward me. Martha Zanko smiled, then, sweetly. Such a smile as I'd never seen on her face, or any other woman's. She nodded, and turned, and—kissed me, hard.

"For all the boys," she murmured. "I thought I wanted money and position and power. I've got all I want. Right here. Jake. I thought *I* knew, but—*Jake* knew. The plane needs Jake, and Jake needs me. Good-bye, Cranny. Don't worry."

"Nuts," I yelled, and started to yank my chute off. The strapped serum package prevented me. I was fumbling with that when Jake eased Martha aside and struck me, gently but stunningly, with the butt of the .45 automatic on the side of my head.

I stumbled backwards, Jake guiding my fall. I didn't know I was clear of the plane and falling, falling, falling, until I saw those two faces peering at me, ever dimmer in the swirls. I yanked as hard as I could.

The chute's pilot-piece fluttered out and away into the snow swirls and I saw Jake and Martha's faces above me, looking down, smiling. And somehow, they looked angelic! Laugh if you want to, but they looked like angels watching over me as my chute snapped open and shut them out of my vision.

My feet touched ground, and I tumbled hard, and when I got up, a runway was under me, and a siren moaning Operation's direction. My face was still skyward when that roseate glow showed, spread, hurtling fast away from Main City, and the dull *blooooooooom-boom-boom* of the exploding Trip Thirteen shook the earth and lighted up the skies and the heavens.

Lighted up Heaven itself for two new angels . . .

Bright? The glow was blinding! Just blinding! It—it made my eyes water, when Halley's Comet went to Heaven again in a surf of rippling color, and the sound of a thousand organs crashing a crescendo beat against my ears sounded like Judgment drums.

The cold, or something, had tears running down my cheeks when I felt the serum package safe and started for Main City Operations . . .

YOU know the rest. I mean, the rest about that flight of Jake Halley's. Jake's became a name to think about when pilots spoke of Glory. And Martha became more beautiful than anybody could remember she was, except if you'd seen her with her hand lost in Jake's, and her face smiling down through the whirling snow . . .

Martha Zanko, I mean, of course. Not the new Martha. Joey hired another helper, after a little; and probably in a a gesture of "She wasn't anything to me," he hired another girl named Martha. Martha Ronjay, who had telephoned, and then sent this new man over to arrange his check-ride. A new Gentleman From Hell.

Trip Thirteen had put us on all the front pages, and the major airlines were willing to take us back; with our clippings for publicity, of course. I was set for Federated, with a pay-raise, and my choice of routes. And us all thinking the other had fixed the lock!

Then this jerk had to come in and blow his stack about Joey sitting and looking at those eight locks on his desk. The eight locks he must have found

when Martha's desk was got ready for the new girl. The eight locks that were accounted for by the six of us regular pilots of Operation Snafu, plus Martha Zanko's, plus the one Jake Halley had made a gesture with, himself.

So with the eight locks still accounted for, *how* did a ninth lock get on that door, the lock that held Joey closed in, for once, while Jake started for the ship; perhaps wondering why Joey didn't burst out and overtake him, as he usually did?

I knew then where that ninth lock had come from, and I saw that the other boys did, too. It had been put on that door by Joey Halley himself—by Joey Halley, who had given his kid brother everything else in life; and when there was no other way to save the kid, had given him TripThirteen—and immortality!

I could guess Joey Halley's feelings, looking at those locks and realizing we all had had the idea away ahead of him; but we hadn't been gutsy enough to go through with it. Or—we hadn't been big brother enough to go through with it. Only Joey Halley wouldn't be seeing it like that. Joey Halley would be seeing it that he had been harder than the rest of us, and he'd always wonder, maybe, if he couldn't have brought Trip Thirteen back.

He couldn't. He couldn't have kept it flying as long as it flew. Or fell, or floundered, or hurtled, or whatever it did up to that final last second when the man who had tailed after Joey Halley like a comet went into eternity like a comet: flaming and leaving the world something to talk about.

If ever a man was born for just one flight, Jake Halley was born for Trip Thirteen.

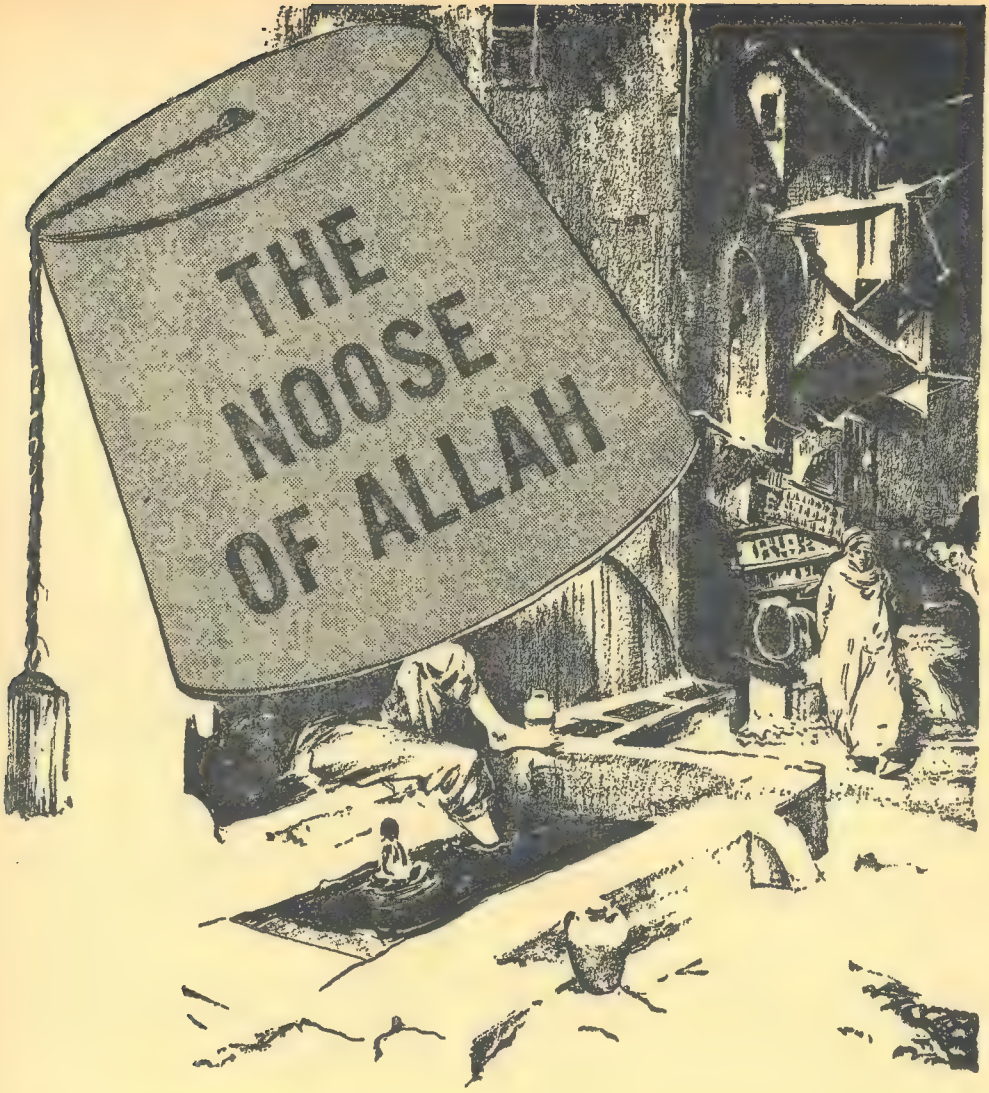
Oh, sure; I shouldn't have belted the new guy. And when the new guy came to, I knew what I was going to get. I didn't care. What had me burned up was, if he'd shut his mouth, I'd have been on my way to Federated. Now, I was stuck. With Joey Halley.

How can you leave a guy who has the guts to do what Joey did? And if he did it in large part for Jake, he also did it for us. For his Gentlemen From Hell. We'd sweated it out for Jake. We'd paid his way. Joey was making him pay it back, when he sent him out on that last ride. I saw the other boys felt exactly my way about it.

"Come on," I said glumly. "Let's tell Joey we're sticking. Maybe, now, life will be a little easier around here. Let's go."

But if life was going to be easier, it didn't start out that way. The new guy came to and caught up with me, and if he can fly like he can use his dukes, then Halley Airways really has a very fine and new Gentleman From Hell for the payroll!

The sun was coming out from behind the clouds when I turned my lump face toward Ops again.



ILLUSTRATED BY
ROGER L. THOMAS

By
ROBINSON
MacLEAN

JEFF ACRES had got himself drunk as a skunk. That was the only thing I could figure. We were partners, sure, but I'd kept the tug standing by at Port Sudan for three days, and I'd hired the barge to carry the caskets, but all I could get out of him was a lot of nonsense wires that sounded like he'd turned into an Arab Holy Roller.

He began to push the gate shut in my face.

And the wires kept coming. Wires that didn't mean anything, collect, out of Khartoum. They were all about some citizen named Al Masad that I'd never met, and when I phoned Kalomiris at the Palm Trading office he'd never heard of him either.

There were two other things getting in my hair, down at the dock. One was the yackety-yack among the Arab hired hands about some local yokel known as the Noose of Allah, and the other was a little stooge in a white suit that kept following me, and turning up around corners, and dodging when I tried to chase him off.

When I got three messages from Jeff, all inside a quarter hour of each other,

I told Bedawi to tend the office, anchored the tug inside the break of the pier, and grabbed the next plane for Khartoum.

When the pilot started letting down, over the hump of the mountains, and before I could see either the Blue Nile or the White, I got the messages out again.

Whatever Jeff was drinking, they ought to stop making it.

"Two hundred and fifteen coffins, covering cargo, will leave Palm Trading warehouse Friday as arranged. Address any inquiries 99 Hasheesh Street." That was the first, and the only one that made sense. When I bought the tug from War Assets Administration, after Jeff and I got fired by the oil company for cutting corners over Arabia, it was Jeff that got the hot flash we could pay overhead by towing barges across the Red Sea to Jidda with the coffins of the characters that had rich relatives and a desire to get put away in Mecca.

The second one was short. "Mayday," it said. If Jeff had been sober it would have been a different thing, because "Mayday" is international pilot slang for "SOS." It's French, somebody told me once, but I wouldn't know about that. All I know is Jeff Acres was the guy that twisted his Seafire down onto a short bench on an island off Hokkaido, under Jap fire, the day I had to mayday, and took me back to the carrier flying piggyback in a one-man cockpit. And the other thing was Jeff was polluted when he wired me, because the third wire didn't make any sense at all.

One of the dockhands at the pier said it sounded like something out of the Mohammedan Bible, but dockhands will say anything and there's mighty few of them ever read a Bible in any language.

"Warfare is ordained for you," the damn thing started out, "though it is hateful to you, but it may happen that you hate a thing which is good for you and love a thing which is bad for you. Allah knows. You don't. Al Bakara."

THERE was an Arab on the plane with me, and he said it sounded familiar and Al Bakara meant cow, if you wanted to translate it, but as far as I was concerned it was just plain bull and Jeff Acres was blotto.

We got talking about this Noose of Allah character, after what we'd read in the papers, but he didn't know anything you couldn't read over somebody's shoulder. There were seventy-three separate brands of Mohammedan, he said, and once in a while one of the branches would get hostile and start a Holy War.

But that happens in other congregations, too. Look at the problems the U. N. gets handed.

One thing he did say, he's seen another letter this Noose of Allah had written to the papers, saying he was finished with Mecca and the new Holy City ought to be on some mountain in Iran. But not even the editors believe the stuff in those letters. And if they were going to cut off the tourist trade to Mecca it'd mean our deal with the coffins was kaput, and Jeff should have been lining up some new trade instead of getting cute with the Koran.

After we landed, and I'd had a chance to talk with Kalomiris, I was surer than ever that while Jeff Acres was fun in a bar he was hell on wheels in a business.

I set out to find him, so I could read him off before I tore our unwritten partnership up under his long nose. He might be English aristocracy, filtered down a couple of generations through the bottom of a whiskey glass, but I was Irish-American and I was hostile, and I was through.

Kalomiris helped me, all he could. He read the messages from Jeff, and got a laugh out of them, and offered to lend me his car to go over to Omdurman across the river where the warehouse was that Jeff had mentioned.

I told him a cab might be easier, since I didn't know the local traffic laws, and since I didn't get away from Port Sudan very often and might get a notion to hunt up somebody more interesting than Jeff Acres.

He asked me if I still wanted to haul his coffins, the way Jeff had arranged, and I told him the barge was ready and I'd appreciate the business.

While he talked he kept running some fat amber beads through his fingers, like

a Jap on an abacus. When I asked him, he showed me. They were pretty stuff, and he said that fiddling with them was a good substitute for smoking. The Arabs used them for prayers, he said, like a rosary. I told him it was a short rosary, if you got the kind of penance they issue with big sins, and he got a boot out of it.

"They use it to recite the names of Allah," he said. "The merciful names, and the awesome names. There are ninety-nine names."

It didn't look like ninety-nine beads, I said. He showed me. There were thirty-three, and you ran around the course three times. I said they could have made it an even hundred, and he just laughed and told me the superstition that the hundredth name is the one nobody is allowed to say, and the only living being that knows it is the camel and that's why it's got that superior smile.

I told him I'd let him know if I found Jeff, and what he'd been drinking, and that I'd expect his coffins down on the next train. Then I hired a cab.

It was dark by the time we got across the river, and damn dark when I found an inhabitant, back of the Large Market, that had heard of Hasheesh Street. I was blocks away from the cab by now, because the alleys weren't any wider than a hungry mule, but I wanted to get Jeff sobered up and back on the beam and I would have taken a tour down an ant-hill if I'd thought that was where he was sleeping it off.

By the smell you could tell that there hadn't been any breeze down these alleys since Cleopatra's last birthday, but the sand was getting in anyway, sifting down from the wind overhead, gritting on my teeth and sticking to the sweat under my arms and between my fingers, and making the street lights dim and copper-colored.

He was standing at the corner of a mud wall, poking his skinny neck around the corner, watching something, but the white suit and the Panama made me think he might understand American.

"Hasheesh Street?" I asked him. "Could you tell me where to find Hasheesh Street?"

He pulled the neck in and twisted around to face me.

"Street of Grasses?" he said. "Sikket Hasheesh? This is her."

I went down, where he'd been looking, trying to make out the numbers in the low glow of the light, and telling myself that I was nuts for thinking that the little citizen back at the corner looked like the bum that was tailing me in Port Sudan, days ago, and miles away.

IN THE daytime the natives walk wide of you, in Omdurman, but when night comes down you've got to push your way. The old ladies grumbled, pulling in their legs to let me pass, and somebody tripped me flat on the cobbles, but when I took a swing at him I found it was only a yellow dog, sleeping on the street. I was blocks past the last street light, trying to pick the number, when somebody lit a lantern on the left and I made out *99* painted in English and Arab on a sheet-steel gate beside my right shoulder.

There wasn't any handle, or any bell, and if Jeff Acres was inside, drunk, there wasn't a bell made that could wake him, so I found a loose corner of the corrugated iron they built the warehouse out of, and I hammered on it until I must have wakened half of Africa.

Finally, through the chink below the bottom hinge, a wobbly light showed.

The character that opened up was a seven-foot slave in a white nighty and a red fez, with a grass belt tied around his tummy and muscles hanging out wherever they'd be handy. He yawned, lifted up the lantern so he could see my face, and waited.

"I want to see Mr. Acres," I told him. "Friend of Mr. Kalomiris. English. Maybe drunk."

He shook his head.

"Hasheesh Street?" I asked him. "Ninety-nine Hasheesh Street? Nine nine? *Tassa tassa?*"

He nodded, and the blue tassel flapped on his fez.

"Acres," I told him. "Kalomiris."

He bent down slow and set the lantern on the floor and began to push the gate shut in my face.

I was out of my weight-class, but I had enough mad to make the difference.

We spilled the lantern, and after I sat on his chest and read him the riot act he dug out candles and we paraded around the warehouse like a couple of altar-boys, although the bruises wouldn't have looked good in the daylight. My bruises. He didn't show anything through that carbon-copy skin, although he admitted his name was Mangangani and Mr. Kalomiris hired him to watch the coffins.

Jeff wasn't there. There wasn't anything there, except an outside rat running ahead of us and the damn coffins, stacked up in the middle of the slab, six high and six wide and six deep, the two hundred and fifteen corpses Jeff had told me we could ferry across the Red Sea for a profit.

After I'd made sure, I gave this Mangangani a handful of piasters and told him if Jeff showed up to pin him down and keep him there and call me, through Kalomiris.

He grinned.

"No bloody bleeding chance," he told me. "You find him, you catch him."

I told him to go back to sleep, but he was shutting the steel gates before I finished the sentence.

I waited for my eyes to get used to the dark outside after the dazzle of the candles.

There was still a little light, coming from inside, and shining down on the cobbles through the crack under the bottom hinge. I saw something glisten, down in the filth between a pair of boulders, and I reached for it but he took the candle away and I couldn't tell what it was so I stuck it in my pocket and reminded myself to see when I got back to civilization.

I had to retreat by Braille, cursing Jeff Acres at every step, and every time I barked a shin. I passed an alley and tried to remember where I'd left the Cattle Market and the taxi, but they weren't putting out answers.

I was standing there, trying to remember, when I heard the sound of a street-car, miles away, headed back for the barn and going clackety-click, clackety-click, just like the street-cars in San Pedro, or San Antonio, or White Plains, New York.

"The hell with Africa," I told me. "The hell with Khartoum, and the Blue Nile and the White Nile, and Omdurman, and Allah, and me, Mickey Sullivan."

None of them answered, so I put my hands out and started to feel my way back to the hack.

The cops are the same all over, but in the Sudan they wear fezzes.

The first thing I got was the sound of the whistles, then the idea that if I wanted to take a back exit it would have a wagon waiting, and somebody asking your name and address, and what you knew about the corpse.

I tried a break, off-tackle, but it was the way I said.

They had a basket there, under the light of the cops' lanterns, and they were scraping somebody in off the pavement who had worn a white duck suit and a Panama hat and a briefcase, while he was living.

He wasn't living now.

Ten inches of grass rope, sticking out over his collar like a leash, proved it. There were eight inches more but you couldn't see them because they were sunk under the bulging blue flesh. I got out.

Half a block I got out, then the cop stopped me.

He was a kid, maybe twenty-five, and he came within a couple of counties of Antrim, and when I told him I was a Sullivan he told me to get to where there were street lights, and stay away from this end of town from now on out because you could get better, and cheaper, and safer.

What was it all about, I asked him.

The Noose of Allah, he said. Like the thugs in India, and the assassins in Persia, and the priests of the Crocodile God Sebek that used to run the Nile and choke off any opposition in their spare time between council meetings.

Then his sergeant blew a whistle and he straightened his fez out over a tassel of red hair and pushed back through the natives toward the warm corpse. And I tried to track back to my hackie, and made it after three stabs.

I got in, but he didn't start.

I leaned over and poked him, and he turned around confidentially and asked me if I wanted to meet a nice girl.

I was still telling him what he could do with his nice girl when he pulled up in front of the Khamsin Club, and after a short war over a long bill he went away.

I WENT in past two British generals reading *Punch* in the lobby, and I couldn't think of any bets I'd missed, hunting for Jeff, but all the time I knew I was kidding myself.

I told the steward to get my bill ready, I was checking out. The tug was sitting down in Port Sudan, eating its head off, and if I couldn't find Jeff and see what other deals he'd made, besides the coffins, it was time I headed back and hunted up some fresh cargo.

I got to the room and the phone was ringing.

"Kalomiris, old man," he said. I asked him if he still wanted me to haul his corpses.

You could hear he had his lips up thick in the mouthpiece. "Under the circumstances, no. I'm sending my shipment over by air. I've identified the body but I won't say anything to the police, you undertsand."

I didn't. I told him so.

"You were seen talking to Mr. Acres on the Sikket Hasheesh. I have a copy of the wireless message in which Mr. Acres made the appointment. After all, old man, I can be a sport, but I'd suggest you leave at once. I can get you a seat on the plane."

I got mad then, the way you do when somebody feeds you that kind of double-talk. Where was Jeff Acres, I asked him.

There was a greasy laugh, and somebody knocked on the door.

"Just a minute," I said, but he'd hung up.

When I opened the door it was a tired Kiwanian in a wrinkled linen suit and a scowl.

"Sullivan?" he said. I told him I had a plane to catch and didn't want to buy anything. I pushed the door but he had a foot inside.

He reached out and ran his hands down me, while he kicked the door shut behind him, and I knew he was police before he got out the badge.

"Friend of Mr. Jeffrey Acres?" he asked, cold, and I told him I'd bail Jeff out if I could raise it but I wouldn't waste any more time on him.

He fed me a funny look.

"Mr. Acres was killed a few hours ago," he said. "Whatever you say may be used in evidence, but I'd be interested in your movements for the past day."

I asked who strangled him, and he asked how I knew he'd been strangled.

It took half the night clearing that up. Maynard, the cop's name was. Sudan C.I.D. He washed me out as a suspect, and he didn't make me identify the body. Kalomiris had done that, he said.

I went back to the Khamsin Club and told the steward to check me out again.

"I got my bags packed," I told him. "Send the porter up and give him. . ."

I had my hand out, with a palm full of silver, but there was something in the middle of the piasters. A ring.

I started to shove it back, because it

was one I'd made myself out of the prop of a kamikaze that came aboard the carrier off Okinawa, when I remembered three things.

Jeff Acres had won it off me, three years back, playing acey-deucey.

Maynard, the cop, had told me Jeff was strangled two blocks away from 99 Hasheesh Street, an hour before I got there.

But I'd picked the ring up outside the warehouse door, and remembering the trouble Jeff had shoving it down over his knuckle the day he won it, I knew it hadn't dropped off. In the six months we'd worked together, since we bought the tug, I couldn't remember a day he hadn't worn it.

The hurt, knowing Jeff was dead, was just beginning to be real. A tramp like me meets a lot of people but damn few of them start out gentlemen and very damn few end up friends.

I didn't want to see him again, strangled, with nothing left but puffy blue flesh for a face, but I had to give the ring back to him. I didn't know why, but I wanted him to have it, wherever he was going. And all the way to the morgue I kept wondering why I hadn't recognized him when I watched the police pick him up off the cobbles. What was left of him.

The attendant on duty was another overgrown Nubian and it took me five minutes to make him understand who I wanted to see, and get the sheet pulled back off the body. I had the ring ready to give back to him. But I didn't.

It was the body I'd seen on Hasheesh Street. But it wasn't Jeff Acres.

It was little Turkey-Neck, that'd been shadowing me from the port to Hasheesh Street. I told the Nubian he'd got the wrong body.

He picked the tag up, tied on the end of the rope that had strangled him, and showed it to me: *Jeffrey H. Acres, Port Sudan, strangulation, Maynard investigating. Identified by Cyril Kalomiris, friend.*

It didn't make sense, but the Nubian just shook his fez when I asked him where the other body was, Acres' body, and I finally got to Maynard's office in the C.I.D.

I could have kissed him when I found out he didn't have any other bodies, and Jeff was probably still just a drunk skunk, but he didn't want to argue with me about how Kalomiris could have made that kind of mistake.

There was trouble, he said. I told him there'd be more trouble if he kept on hanging the wrong tags on the right bodies and he got mad.

There were times, the way he told it, when a few counterfeit corpses didn't matter. There were times when bigger things were shaping than all the run-of-the-mill asassinations that could crop up between the Cape and Cairo.

I finally got him factual. It was this Noose of Allah business again, but this time the Noose had hit the jackpot. Maynard showed me the letter—half a page of wiggly Arabic—and read it out.

"Brothers under Allah. We will meet as pilgrims at the Sacred Rock in Mecca. Thousands will die by the blasphemy of our enemies, but we will arise in the millions to destroy. Al Masad."

"Crackpot," I said.

"You're a damn fool," he told me. "You've just seen one corpse. How many do you need?"

Nobody was going to buy that kind of propaganda, I said, and anyway Mecca was off his beat, but it was funny this Al Masad was mixed up in it.

There were five of them around me, hammering me with questions, by the time it wasn't funny any longer. "Al Masad" is Arab for a kind of rope, twisted out of palm fiber, and it was the name this "Noose of Allah" had been using in his own tongue. That was easy. The hard part came in explaining how Jeff Acres would have run across the name, and wired me about it, and a tip they had that this Al Masad was going to touch off a bomb in the Ka'aba at Mecca, when the pilgrimage was drawing its peak crowd.

I couldn't show them the messages, because I'd left them with Kalomiris, but Maynard was on the phone to get carbons from the company and the rest of the Criminal Investigation Department was convincing me that if anybody triggered off a bomb at Mecca, and killed even one Arab, there'd be a ruckus let

loose that'd fill a lot of cemeteries with a lot of little white crosses, and stars, and crescents.

I kept asking them how one wild-eyed fanatic could do all that, but Maynard got off the phone and reminded me about a recent fanatic named Adolf.

The phone rang again, and Maynard told me it was the Khamsin Club, with a wire.

"There's been a mistake," the steward said, "but I thought I should tell you. I paid the charges because it was addressed to you, but there's been a mistake in the message. Something left out."

I asked him what was left in. "Mayday," he said. I told him it was an old one, just catching up, but he said I'd better call the telegraph company and they said it'd been filed out of the Omdurman office half an hour before.

Jeff was still in trouble, and I got a deep creep that he might be sober. I couldn't sell the cops, and all that was left was another cab, and back to Hasheesh Street, and the memory of the palm noose buried in the neck of the little guy on the slab that had Jeff's name hung on him.

THE SUN was sulking up, red under the sand on the horizon, but the street didn't smell any better and this time it took twenty minutes to get Mangangani, the warehouse Hercules, to unbar the gate.

There was light enough between the corrugated sheets to count the coffins again, but they hadn't changed.

They were all new, and all the same, except for painted numbers. They were stacked in a neat black cube. About two hundred pounds apiece, I figured, including the lead lining the health authorities demand, plus the weight of corpse.

I thought of trying to argue the big Nubian into letting me open them, but even wtih a crowbar and a couple of husky helpers it'd be a two-day job, and Kalomiris had said he was shipping them today.

I heard somebody walking up to the warehouse, outside, and the sound was familiar—a loose she-sole going flippety-flop.

"I'm sorry," I told Mangangani, but he didn't answer because I sank a fist into his solar plexus and when he doubled over I chopped him across the back of the neck with the edge of my hand. One at a time was all I could handle. The steps outside had stopped, and there was a soft rap.

I pulled back of the door and waited.

There was another rap, and the door began to open, inch by inch. Just when I was set for action a head poked through, about waist-high. I uncocked. It was a kid. A skinny nine-year-old with button eyes and a long, tattered blue shirt, and he flopped into the door.

I shut the gate again, and barred it.

"Don't be afraid," I said.

"I'm not in the slightest afraid," he said. "I don't think he's dead. I think you just knocked him unconscious."

I told him he had a lot of language for a little shaver, and he asked me if they didn't have schools where I came from.

I found some silver, and asked him to help me look through the coffins. I couldn't look through them all but I could start. We climbed up, on the side-handles, and began on the corner casket nearest the door.

The lid wasn't screwed down, and the lead inner-lining was open. It was empty.

We finished half the top layer without finding a full box, and I asked the kid, Nuri, how long he thought it'd take to finish the stack, all two hundred and fifteen.

"Two hundred and sixteen," he said. "It's six times thirty-six."

I gave him a long look, and it began to dawn.

There were only 215 coffins listed in Jeff's wire, but you couldn't build an even stack, like this, without having another coffin—or a hollow.

Mangangani stirred a little, and the kid offered to tie him up. I told him to go ahead and went on peeling one wall of caskets off the edge of the stack, pushing them down and letting them lie where they fell, looking for the gap where the missing casket could have fitted.

"What are you looking for?" Nuri asked me.

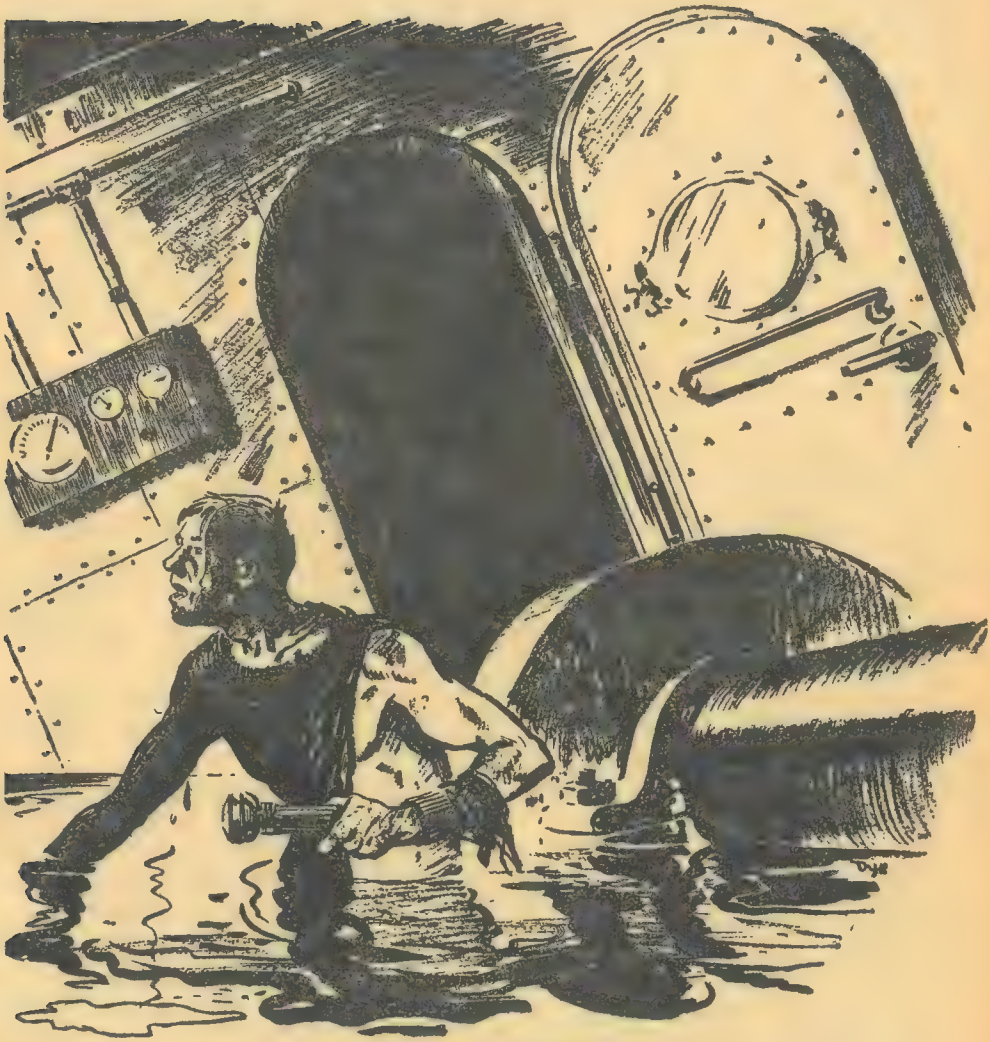
He wouldn't understand, I started, then I remembered his trick with the

(Continued on page 128)

THE BOSUN'S MITE

The bosun raised the operator off the ladder and leaned down towards Fox. "You all right?" he said.

By ROBERT CARSE



ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES DYE

A LOT of old-timers along the waterfront used to say it was easy to tell why Jake Ketcham, the bosun, and Bill Fox hated each other so much. The bosun was big, close to six feet four, and over the years violent and partly successful attempts had been made to disarrange his features. Fox was small, just a bit over five feet high, and as handsome as the bosun was ugly.

The reason for their feud was supposed to come out of that contrast between them. But there was a great deal more to it than any physical difference. Even Tinette, who ran the Café Select in Marseilles, wasn't responsible. Captain Miller knew, of course, as did Perlstine, the fat, shrewd messman. They'd been shipmates with the pair aboard the *Cyrus F. Plank* when she was torpedoed, and also later aboard the *Antilles*. Neither of them ever talked, though, because of their liking for the two men.

All the trouble started the night Bill

Fox joined the *Plank*. He had been sent over from the union hall to replace another able-bodied sailor who had been taken sick. The *Plank* was at one of the Hoboken piers to load. Fox came up Water Street with his seabag and met the bosun and a few more of the deck gang in front of a joint.

"For what ship, brother?" the bosun asked him, half-drunk and more curious than he should have been.

"The *Plank*," Fox said. "But what's it to you?"

"I'm her bosun, that's what it's to me." Then the big man turned and gestured to the deck gang. "Look at the kind of guys the hall is giving us for sailors. Some character on the scram-from-a-midget show."

"Go fry your back," Fox said.

In answer, the bosun picked up Fox and the seabag. He put Fox and the seabag on his shoulders. He walked across the street carrying them, and Fox didn't speak or struggle. But that was the spring of 1944, and the MP's at the gate told the bosun to knock off. He put Fox down, then the seabag. The way he did it made Fox look no taller than the seabag. The deck gang laughed, and the MP's. Fox grinned himself. "You and I are going to have plenty of fun," he said to the bosun. He showed his pass and went on through the gate alone.

THE next morning when the bosun gave out the work, he put Fox in the fore-peak splicing wire. He slid down the ladder around nine o'clock to see how Fox was making out. Fox had already finished the first splice, begun a second. "That's West Coast style," the bosun said, fingering the tucks. "This is an East Coast ship. We use the Liverpool splice."

Fox stood holding the marline spike and looking at the bosun. "You'd better do it the way you like it," he said. "What other job you got for me?"

"A nice one down in the lower peak," the bosun said, not too sure that Fox wasn't ready to hit him with the spike and made angry by the idea. "Clean it out. When it's clean, paint it. Get going!"

"That's ordinary seaman's work," Fox said, very quietly. "I'm a sailor."

"Yeah," the bosun said. He tilted the fancy high pressure cap he had bought the night before. "But I'm the fella who gives the orders here."

Fox had to stow a lot of ugly odds and ends of gear in the hot depths of the lower peak. But by chow-time he was at his painting.

The gang stared curiously at him when he came in to chow, having heard about last night and having seen the excellence of the splice he had made. Then they saw his cap where he had hung it on a bulkhead hook right beside the bosun's high pressure article.

His cap was the simple, cheap type with a visor and black silk top that was worn by thousands of seagoing men. He had found time during the morning, though, to decorate it. Across the front he had placed with meticulous skill in aluminum paint the house flag design of the company. The visor was also decorated. It bore a double row of oak leaves. Perlstine was the first one to laugh; he slid a pile of empty dishes onto the mess-table and guffawed.

"Not a bosun," Perlstine said hoarse-voiced; "not a captain yet. But an admiral. . ."

The bosun sat with the carpenter at a little side table which befitted their rating. The carpenter, a gaunt and bilious Esthonian, looked up and studied the display. "So," he said. He rose and took down his cap, a faded red woolen object.

The bosun nearly choked over the half a boiled potato he had in his mouth. But he said nothing when he had finished it. He continued eating in furious silence.

That afternoon several things happened. Two ordinary seamen were sent down into the peak to give Fox a hand. The bosun either lost or misplaced his high pressure cap, and in any event he appeared on deck bare-headed. The men started calling their new shipmate "Foxy", and the younger sailors asked him how to make the West Coast splice.

From then on, naturally, it was a bitter and implacable contest between him and the bosun. Both had fierce pride in their seamanship, tried to prove their superiority over each other. The bosun had a lot

in his favor because of his heft and strength. But he was too big to be anything but clumsy aloft, and there Fox was supreme. Fox was amazingly strong for his size, and, as Captain Miller described him to the mate, he ran around in the rigging like a squirrel with fire up its tail.

When the *Plank* took her place in convoy, the wagers were even, and interest in the feud was subsiding. This was the long Western Ocean haul, and their ship was part of some tremendous operation. Although the *Plank* carried general cargo, other vessels were chock-a-block with explosives and high test gasoline.

It was the European invasion, the scuttle-butt squad told each other. But Captain Miller did nothing to confirm or deny the rumors, and as they settled down to convoy routine, the crew began to give their attention to the steward and what the steward put on the tables and called food.

The sorest point of all was the fish-balls served at breakfast. Neither the carpenter, who was a cod-fish addict, or Perlstine, who claimed to like most any dish, could handle them. Angry cries racketed in the mess-room every morning. One of the Navy gunners, a strapping Georgia boy, went so far as to offer the steward a fish-ball shampoo. The crew met in special union meeting and the steward was questioned and found badly wanting. A unanimous resolution was passed that the bosun, as ship's delegate, inspect every bit of stores in the cold locker with the steward, and report back to the crew for further action.

Bill Fox was finishing a job of painting up on the boat deck when the bosun came to get the steward for the inspection. He was near the steward's room and could hear what went on. "Let's go take a look, belly-robber," the bosun said.

The steward moaned. "I ain't feeling too well," he said. "You come around tomorrow, bosun."

"You want," the bosun asked, "a busted leg?"

"Oh, no!" the steward said, and took his keys off the rack.

The steward was strictly the starvation kind, Bill Fox thought. But the bosun was still too tough; he needed more of the good old treatment. It was a pity, Fox knew, that he didn't get along well with the bosun. The other man was a true sailor. They could exchange plenty about their trade, and none of it nasty. For him, though, it was hard to forget what the bosun had done that night in Hoboken and then his first day aboard the ship.

Fox stared out over the convoy. The sea lay in smooth-gleaming panels between the rows of ships. Beyond, the escort destroyers kicked the silver expanse into foamy ridges where they raced back and forth, and overhead were the guardian planes. A few more days, Fox told himself, and you'll probably be in Marseilles, because the course is laid off for the Mediterranean and the invasion of South France is about due. Get that knuckle-head bosun ashore and have some drinks with him and you should square away everything. A guy like him, when he's civilized, ought to be your friend.

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THE shock of the explosion was small. Fox hardly felt it, no more than a faint, upward tremor through his legs from the deck. But the ship was beginning to list way over to starboard, and out on the water he saw the bubble-marked torpedo track. Destroyers were throwing depth-charges; they stamped the sea with huge, pounding blows. The planes came hawk-like down the sky. Their bomb blasts crossed, recrossed the depth-charge patterns.

Then Fox had no more time to watch. Captain Miller and the second mate were in the bridge wing, white-faced, shouting. The general alarm bells gave their clangor through the ship, but from the engine-room there came a thick smash of sound, a single scream.

Fox ran for the door leading below. His boat station was right here, and the thought of having to leave the open deck made him gasp. But it was almost certain that he was the only man who knew that the bosun and the steward were down in the cold locker.

He met the gunners on the ladders. They sprinted cursing for their stations. Behind them came the crew, some carrying wounded, others dazed and sick with shock. He fought past them and on and down, again down.

All the lights were out except one emergency lantern in a bulkhead clip. He took that, for he was alone here, and started down the last flight of ladders. The steward lay at the bottom where the concussion had pitched him, his body oddly pulled, the bones of his neck up jaggedly through the back of his khaki shirt, the stores list crumpled in his hand. Fox sprang over the steward's body. "Hey, bosun!" he yelled into the escaping steam sound, the wrenching, final struggle of the ship.

The vast oak door of the cold locker was jammed tight shut. "I'll be with you," Fox shouted up against it, then went back and got a fire ax.

He came upon the bosun unconscious in a corner. The man hunched in a welter of smashed mayonnaise and jam jars hurled from the shelves. Sides of beef, cans of peanut butter and lard had hit him in the head. A lather of the stuff clung to his body, and Fox strained to get him to the door, lift him along the ladders.

You're on the high side, Fox kept thinking. But, hurry. It won't be long now. . . Light reached down the ladder-way. He recognized the skinny young third mate and the deck cadet. They called to him, but it wasn't any good for him to try and answer. His breath was gone, and across his brain was the impulse to let the bosun go, run, run up to the light.

But his fingers held in the bosun's collar. He dragged higher, stumbling over the steel ladder treads, gripping at the handrail for support. Then the third mate and the cadet took the bosun from him. "Move," the third mate said. "Go on alone!"

Fox stayed stubbornly there, helped them lift the bosun. You saved him, he thought. You're not going to let him go, ship or no ship.

The deck and the rail seemed to veer to meet them. They straddled the rail where the boat-falls dangled. But the boat was gone, away from the ship. "We'll have to jump," the third mate said.

"Hand him outboard to me," Fox said. He took the bosun in his arms, poised, swung forward, out and down from the ship. He saw the water coming, but there was nothing he could do to prepare for it. The force of the impact immediately blanked his brain.

Captain Miller's boat rescued him and the bosun, transferred them to a destroyer. They stayed in her sick-bay for some days, and then, with the South of France beach-head secured, they were sent to join their shipmates in Marseilles. The bosun knew Marseilles well. It was, he told Fox, his town, and they should set forth together and get good and stinking drunk.

Fox was willing. The bosun had shown himself very aware of what had happened, and Fox believed that they were on their way to be close friends. But once in the odoriferous depths of the Rue Taureau Trapu and standing at the battered zinc bar in a place called the Café Select, Fox changed his mind.

Tinette was behind the bar, and Ti-

nette obviously had been in the past the bosun's armful. She wore her black hair piled high, a wisp of a shirtwaist, a short, tight skirt and a freshly liberated pair of silk stockings. Fox could only agree with the bosun that Tinette had all, and more, than was needed. In a prominent position at the bar, though, was a man to whom the bosun laughingly referred as Vaano, the Terrible Swede. Fox wasn't able to share in the bosun's laughter.

Vaano looked to him like a shore-going outsize version of a sea lion. His bald and pink skull had apparently been used to break open most anything, including other skulls. The eyes were tiny, a red-mottled green, and the teeth that remained had the sharpness of tusks. From the huge shoulder slope the hands dangled down as far as the knees. Fox let go a weary sigh. He could understand now where the bosun had got some of his scars.

There was brandy, and Tinette poured it, and they drank. Then the bosun began to explain how Fox had saved his life. That bored Fox and he didn't listen. He glanced around, figuring where he could go and what he would do when the fight came. The other customers were a Moroccan infantryman with a Chinese girl, a fisherman redolent of fish, and a Legionnaire with a hangover that had almost crippled him.

"The little guy," the bosun repeated, "he saved me."

"Why not," Vaano said, "you don't get fellar yer own size?"

Fox ordered another round of brandy, then beckoned Tinette out from the bar. A French style juke-box was in the corner and he got it to play. He might as well enjoy himself, he decided, until the bosun and Vaano put on the floor show. He and Tinette had several dances. He found her lithe in his arms, very exciting. They were cheek to cheek, and he was forgetful of everything but her presence when there was the smacking crack of a fist.

He whirled from her and sidewise into the juke-box. It was Vaano who had hit him. The bosun leaned against the bar and laughed. "Go ahead," the bosun said. "If you were tough enough to haul me out of the cold locker, you're tough enough to take him on in this fight."

So it was a question of pride, Fox thought bitterly as he braced himself for the Swede's rush. The bosun couldn't take the fact that he had been saved by a little man. Somehow, that shamed the bosun. For the same reason, the Swede was jealous of him; Vaano and the bosun must have had many fights here in the past and come out at just about a draw.

Vaano charged with the pink skull lowered and Fox smashed a chair against it, but then the Swede had him. He took Fox by the heels and swung him three times before he let go. "Find yer own gurl," he said. "T'is vun mine."

Fox caromed off the door, bounced in the street. He was getting his wits together, trying to stand as the bosun emerged hurtling to his side. The bosun, it seemed, had been caught off guard while he stood laughing at the bar. His nose had gone adrift across his face, and when he spoke, he spit out teeth. "Let's go back in," he told Fox. "Let's get the guy."

"You first," Fox said. Aiming carefully, he hit the bosun behind the ear. He looked back to see Tinette at the door of the *café*. She was throwing a bucket of water over the bosun. That, Fox thought, was fine. That was perfect. In a few minutes the bosun would get up and go in and buy some more drinks, have another try with Vaano. But, for himself, he'd wait. He'd take any ship the bosun took and he would come back here to the café. The feud wasn't finished between him and the bosun, and it might last a long time. The only difference now was that Tinette and Vaano were parts of it.

THE *Antilles* was the ship Fox caught next with the bosun. They chose her because Captain Miller was in command and she was to be steadily employed on the Marseilles run. Perlstine and a good number of the old *Plank* crew went along too, tacitly eager to stay together, and finding in the revival of the feud relief from convoy jitters.

Ambition had come upon the bosun. He was determined to better himself and become a licensed officer, thus impress if

not fully win Tinette. Learning navigation was his first step, and he worked at it in all his spare time. But in his concentration he forgot the degree of Fox's guile.

Fox already had a fair idea of navigation. He was also in league with the chief engineer, a small man, whose secret hobby was to check daily the ship's course and run. The chief had a sextant and all sorts of navigation books and a well-rated chronometer in his room. It was his habit to go to the stern of the ship during the afternoon hours, take several sights, work them out and check them with his engine performance and the captain's reported position.

While the bosun was on the bridge being taught the handling of the sextant by the third mate, Fox conspired aft with the chief. Perlstine, the one man in the ship who knew all that was going on, hinted at the fact upon the mess-room blackboard. Above the usual menus, he neatly chalked, "Ketcham Fox?"

The bosun stared uncomprehending at it for more than a week. "What the hell you doin'," he asked Perlstine, "mixin' up my name with that little rascal's?"

Perlstine asked blandly back, "You no savvy Fox?" Then, when the bosun threatened him with a coffee mug, he disappeared into the pantry.

The ship cleared Finisterre, broke convoy inside the Pillars of Hercules and headed alone for the Gulf of Lyons on the last leg of her course. It was fine weather, and the bosun hastened as soon as he could to the bridge with his sextant. There the third mate attempted to explain to him, with Captain Miller and the second mate as interested spectators, how sun sights were used in combination with land bearings to establish position.

A heavy frown held the bosun's brow. Sweat dripped from his blunt fingers. "It ain't like I read in the book," he said. Then he nervously turned, for Fox was coming on the bridge.

Fox nodded to Captain Miller and the mates. "O.K.," he said, "if I get in this navigation stuff, too?"

"Sure," Captain Miller said. "Let's see what you know, Foxy."

"Thank you, sir," Fox said, his tanned, boyish face grave. "I kind of got a system of my own." He drew from the back pocket of his dungarees a huge Stillson wrench, the jaws of which he opened until they framed the sun. Captain Miller, the two officers and the bosun stood in amazed silence. Fox had returned the wrench to his pocket, brought a rule he had borrowed from the carpenter.

He bent and solemnly measured the length of shadow along the bridge planking. Then he tapped his head as though entering into calculation. He pronounced distinctly the latitude and longitude of the ship's position as he and the chief had just achieved it with the best of approved conventional methods in the chief's room.

Captain Miller and his mates studied the shadow, the sun. "Repeat that position," the captain said, his eyes wide.

Fox repeated it in a shy, low voice.

"It's right," the captain said; "correct to the minute, the second and the mile."

"Give me the wrench!" the bosun said, and yanked it from Fox. He glared at the sun through it from a dozen different angles. He took the ruler and on his hands and knees crawled the deck where the shadow lay.

He was still at it when the captain and the mates started to laugh. "Foxy," the captain finally said through the laughter, "when you go back with the wrench and the ruler, tell the chief for me he's a hell of a lot better navigator than I thought."

The bosun let the big wrench fall out of his hand, and it banged his instep unnoticed. He advanced a pace or so towards Fox, his face the color of pea soup, his eyes diffused with blood. "I could bust your brains out," he muttered. "I could slap you so far—"

"Pipe down, bosun," Captain Miller said. "This was a joke and nothing else. Maybe"—the captain was laughing again—"you'd better take your navigation lessons from the bosun's mite. He seems to know a good deal more about it than you do."

Fox was busy picking up the wrench and the ruler. He didn't laugh or smile. Later would be the time for that, he knew. He'd whipped the bosun good. The name the captain had just used would stick. Folks ashore were sure to

hear of it, and the story which caused it. The bosun was no fool. He wasn't the kind to go into the Café Select and take Vaano's jeering in front of Tinette.

Down on the main deck, Fox let the laughter go. He did a series of waltz steps, imagining that Tinette was in his arms. You can get her out of that dump, he promised himself. Take her over on the Cannebiere to some of the real high-tone places where they've got the big violin bands. Vaano won't bother you, not if you're quick and hit him first. . .

FOX was right in his reasoning about the bosun. The man stayed away altogether from the Café Select when the ship docked. Yet, that did Fox no good. He made several sorties upon the Café Select, and each one was brought to dismal failure by Vaano. The Swede descended howling upon him, ripped him from Tinette's side and flung him out into the street. Bruised, bloody and decidedly bowed, Fox realized that he must let it go until another voyage, hoping that meantime Vaano would be seized by either delirium tremens, the *gendarmerie* or the Swedish consul.

But the following trip, the same conditions prevailed. Fox tottered back aboard to receive the bosun's raucous laughter. "Vell," the bosun said in imitation of Vaano's heavy accent, "you ain't yet married the gurl?" Fox said nothing, restrained himself to glum silence. To win, he knew, he had to be patient, and right now he was certainly the loser.

The war ended and the *Antilles* stayed on the run, but it made no difference in Fox's luck with Tinette. He tried various and involved stratagems, driven by the thought that if he was successful his defeat of the bosun would be lasting. Once he disguised himself as an Algerian rug peddler, complete with some flea-filled objects of that art, a *tarboush* and upturnd slippers. But Vaano detected him, made a heap of him and the rugs in the street, the rugs on top. Another time he hired a group of urchins to race past the Café Select shouting fire, only to find Vaano ready for him inside. Again, he brought along some of his huskiest shipmates fortified by generous brandy libations he had bought. Vaano took care of them one by one and collectively, piled them like cordwood beyond the shattered front window.

The bosun was merciless in his mockery back aboard. He took full advantage of Fox's contusions and abrasions, assigned him to difficult, galling work. All the orders he passed to Fox were expressed in a thick Swedish accent, and he drew on the mess-room blackboard a pierced heart with the name of Tinette printed below it.

Fox admitted to himself that he should go into another ship on another run. He stuck with the *Antilles* for one more voyage, though, not out of any deep desire for Tinette, but because he still wanted to square his score with the bosun. That was midwinter, and the ship, laden in bulk grain, rode hard from the moment she dropped the pilot off Ambrose and stood East.

The chief mate was anxious about the grain, not pleased by the way it had been stowed. He kept a watchful eye on the

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inclinometer, thoughtfully scanned the holds for possible shifting. The weather was out of the northeast, became worse day after day until the wind held almost full storm force.

Seas toppled down in vast gray ranks over the foc'sle-head and fore-deck. They slammed and lifted and slung the ship nearly beam-end down. A white rime of brine gathered on the decks, the forward house and the rigging as high as the cross-trees. Leaks started in the overhead of the crew's quarters aft, and the men off watch slept shaken by the thrashing of the propeller, the labored pound of the steering engine.

Captain Miller reduced speed. He changed course to head up more into the weather. But the tenth day out the shifting boards in the holds started to go. They went fast as one enormous wave clanged across the port bow, sharply heeled the ship. The rending of the boards could be heard up in the wheelhouse. Number Two Hold smashed first, then Number Three.

The ship groaned in all her structure. Crockery sharded in the saloon and pantries, pots and pans skidded over the tiles of the galley deck. Men heard those sounds as they tried to stay upright, run forward along the passageways. They stared at each other out of fright-bright eyes. "She's going," they told each other. "She's done."

But she didn't go, not all the way. She lay on her starboard side, careened so far that the water was within a foot of the hatch coamings. Hanging to a stanchion in the bridge wing, Captain Miller called down for all hands to lay aft to the stern. Any minute the water might flood into the forward hatches, and then she would sink like a plummet. The boats had been ripped out of the davits by the tremendous down-thrusting shock, and the chief mate and a sailor who had been with him on the fore deck were lost overside somewhere, would never be found.

The radio operator, at Captain Miller's direct order, left his shack. The set was a smashed tangle, and there was no time to attempt to repair it, rig the auxiliary batteries. Captain Miller came aft himself, bringing the log book and the ship's cat.

He was the last one to use the passageways, for the doors had been sprung open on the weather side, and the great waves combed in, crashed back and forth in a treacherous welter. But the steering engine-house on the poop still stood, and there the crew gathered with frightened bravado.

The black gang watch was in bad shape from burns and Captain Miller tended to them, the quiver slowly leaving his hands. Fox watched him in the light of a flashlight the chief engineer held. He had great respect for the captain, and could understand just what it would mean to lose this ship as well as risk the crew.

Fox stirred uneasily where he squatted, gazed around at the bosun. The bosun was talking in a low voice with the mates about the building of a raft. Planks and rope and tarpaulins were in the after peak locker right below them. Men might go down in there, break out that gear. When the weather eased a bit, the raft could be launched from the stern. If it wasn't built, the bosun said, they'd drown where they were. The ship couldn't live long.

"Aw, shut your fat head," Fox said. "If the ship hasn't gone now, she's not going to go. The grain can't shift any more. She's holding herself in the water. You get on that raft, you'll end up bait for the gulls."

"So what would you do, smart guy?" the bosun said.

It was just what Fox wanted. "Go for'd," he said. "Give Sparks a hand repairing the set and rigging the spare batteries. Then we send out our position. We get some ship to stand by us and put lines aboard. Then we dump the grain and she rights herself and we sail as before."

"You—" the bosun began. But Captain Miller cut in across him. "I can't order any man to go for'd, Foxy. The passageways can't be used. They're death-traps, and there's no way to get along the deck at all."

"How about, sir," Fox said slowly, "the shaft alley-way? Go through it into the engine-room, and up that way to the radio shack?"

"Possible," the captain said after an instant of silence. Pallor was in his face,

and his hands were quivering once more. "But that means a lot of danger, and a man caught in there. . . Have I got any volunteers?"

"Me, you got," Fox said, staring hard at the radio operator. "I'll take a crack at it if Sparks will go with me. Lend us the flashlight, and we'll blinker right straight back to you when we reach the shack."

The radio operator was young, and experiencing his first serious disaster at sea. He ran his tongue along his lips as though they were very dry, then fingered his tensed throat muscles. "I'll go with Foxy," he said. "I think I can make the set work."

Captain Miller and the chief and the bosun went down into the after peak with them. They opened the man-hole plate there that led to the narrow, steel-walled darkness of the shaft alley-way. "Good luck," the captain said, and gave the flashlight to Fox.

IT WAS perhaps sixty feet along the shaft alleyway to the engine-room. Fox had the idea that it was many miles, and so did the operator. They couldn't stand, or move with any speed. The extreme list of the ship kept them down on their knees, pawing along past the huge, slick shaft, hearing and feeling the sea outside, wondering in which second the ship was going to roll, take them to where the pressure flattened them in this tunnel-like space and the water came roaring in from both ends.

There was no good in trying to go back, Fox realized while the fear clasped his heart. They had committed themselves, gone far enough now so that return was just as risky as keeping on forward. So he began to talk aloud to conquer the awful tightness of the fear. He counted the shaft bearings as they passed them, and each one was a distinct victory. He laughed and joyously cursed when they came to the door out into the engine-room. The big steel door handles slipped in his rigid grip, but at last he had the door open, and he and the operator slid through into another and equally terrible place.

The engine-room was awash in fuel oil. It sloshed from bulkhead, to bulkhead, sibilant with the swing of the sea, nauseating to the smell and deadly should it cover them. The radio operator retched and gasped out, "I can't take much more of this, Foxy. I splashed some of it up, and it got in my mouth. I don't think I can make it."

"Grab hold of my jumper," Fox said. "There's the ladders." He swept the flashlight beam over them. "We'll be all right."

But he was remembering then what the tanker sailors had told him, how fuel filled the nose, the ears and eyes, formed a choking glutinous ball in the throat. Go down into the stuff and you don't come back. But keep moving, Foxy. You volunteered for this, and not the bosun. It's sure a fact that you're the bosun's mite. . .

He and the operator clambered around pumps and turbines, sharply cruel, oil-slimed pieces of machinery whose identities they didn't know. Then, though, they were at the ladder foot on the main platform. They began to climb, the operator numbly clinging to Fox's belt. Fox went from handhold to handhold, thinking of nothing but the one ahead. He was unaware for a moment that the operator had released his grip, was flopping backwards down towards the platform.

Fox got him up out of the fuel oil. He cleaned the facial openings, gouged the gummy lock of stuff forth from the mouth. But he had hurt himself coming down the ladder after the operator. One of his legs was bad, and he couldn't make the ladder carrying the operator. He sat on a ladder rung, the operator's head in his lap, and told himself he'd rest, catch his breath. Torpor and then unconsciousness took him as he sat there, planning.

He was roused by the bosun. That man raised the operator off the ladder, then leaned down close towards Fox. "You all right?" he said.

"Yeah," Fox said. "Just my leg ain't so good. But I can make it myself."

The bosun's appearance had an oddly shocking effect on him. Blood from ragged head cuts ran down the broad,

(Continued on page 126)

"I want it back," says Three-Buck. "I got more arrestin' to do."

CHARLEY HOE HANDLE AND THE WEASEL'S CHANCE

By
JIM KJELGAARD

ILLUSTRATED BY PETER KUHLHOFF

WHEN Three-Buck Malone come into Horse Jenkins' office at Beaver Junction his right eye was black, his nose was considerable flatter than it had been the last time Horse saw him, and he smelled of liniment.

"Howdy," says Three-Buck, "I've got Pete Gatter out in my Model T truck."

"Why don't he come in?" says Horse.

"He ain't woke up yet," says Three-Buck.

"What's he doin' in your truck?" says Horse.

"I threw him there," says Three-Buck, "right after I arrested him."

"You arrested him?"

"Sure," says Three-Buck, "I am now a game warden and I can arrest anybody."

"How come?" says Horse, who thought he was the only game warden in Stick County.

"I got proof," says Three-Buck, and he fished in his jeans and brought out a paper. It was all wrote out in gold, and there was a picture of a lion on top, and only Three-Buck's name had been wrote in with indelible pencil. It said:

> The bearer of this paper, Three-Buck Malone, has the right to call himself a game warden.
>
> Chas. Hoe Handle

Horse begun to see the light. Charley Hoe Handle was an old Injun who never had understood why anybody should work for a living when there were easier ways of getting along. He could think of more deviltry in three minutes than all the rest of the county put together could in three weeks.

"How much," says Horse, "did you pay Charley Hoe Handle for this paper?"

"A dollar eighty three," says Three-Buck, "and I want it back. I got more arrestin' to do."

"I'll keep it," says Horse. "You forget about arrestin'."

He walked outside, and just as he got there Pete Gatter rose up in the rear of Three-Buck's truck and rubbed his jaw.

"Ha!" says Pete. "I have fetched Three-Buck in! Now, aside from bein' charged with spearin' wall-eyes, which he done two years ago, I want him charged with strikin' an officer, which he done two hours ago when I went to arrest him."

"You got a paper from Charley Hoe Handle, too?" says Horse.

"I have," says Pete. "It cost a dollar sixty!"

"Give," says Horse.

"But—"

"Give," says Horse, "then git!"

AFTER Three-Buck and Pete had gone, Horse went back into his office to do some thinking. What he thought about was the papers Charley Hoe Handle was selling but, try as he would, Horse couldn't see anything illegal about 'em. Anybody had the right to call himself game warden. Or they could name a cow or dog game warden if they wanted to without busting any law. If they wanted to pay Charley Hoe Handle for telling 'em about that right—

Still, if Charley wasn't stopped soon, Horse knowed that he wouldn't have time for anything except people who was arresting each other. Seeing as the Malones was feuding with the Gatters, and the Crosbys with the Fordyces, and the Slingers with the Wendels, and practically everybody with somebody else, and Charley's paper *looked* official, and everybody who was fighting with somebody else would like nothing better than an excuse to make some arrests—

Horse drove out the black-top, then he swung onto a dirt road where the working farmers lived, then he turned up a two-rut track where some farmers who didn't believe in work hung out. On that track he met Jebby Cahoon.

"Have you seen Charley Hoe Handle lately?" he asked Jebby.

"Sure have!" says Jebby, who seemed real pleased with just about everything. "He was at my shanty not an hour past. Can't linger, Horse. I'm on my way to arrest the passel of no-good Tinseys!"

"What you aim to arrest 'em for?"

"I dunno," says Jebby. "I'll find somethin' after I get 'em arrested. They should ought to be in jail! They stung my best varmint hound with a shot-gun and he's been gun-shy since!"

"Give me," says Horse, "the paper what you bought from Charley Hoe Handle."

"But—"

"Give it to me and git home!" says Horse. "Else I might make up my mind to come see how much out of season venison you got in your store-room!"

Horse went on up the road, and he was just in time to stop Tom Colby from going out and arresting Jack Dunner. Halfway to Dunners he met Jack coming down to arrest Tom. Charley Hoe Handle had flew high and fast while he flew and the hell of it, Horse thought, was that he would get credit for selling the papers but no blame for taking 'em away again. Horse Jenkins was doing that.

It was almost night when at last, and on foot, Horse come to old man Sharton's cabin. Old man Sharton liked the bush but he didn't like company, so he'd built his shanty back where he'd get the least possible amount of it. There wasn't any road past, or even near, his shanty.

"Hi," says Horse.

"For pete's sake!" says old man Sharton, "you're the third person past here this month! I'm goin' to move back where it ain't so crowded, that's what!"

"You seen Charley Hoe Handle?"

"He was past an hour ago," says old man Sharton. "He said he was goin' to Cribbidy Crick and get hisself a couple of trout."

"Thanks," said Horse.

It was dark when Horse got to Cribbidy Crick, but he could smell the smoke from Charley Hoe Handle's cooking fire. Horse made a way towards it, but he went quiet. Charley Hoe Handle, given a weasel's warning, could slip away like a weasel. Horse stepped suddenly into the firelight.

"Hi," says he.

"Well, well!" says Charley Hoe Handle, who had just ate a mess of trout and was laying against a log smoking his pipe. "Hello, Horse!"

"You know why I'm here?"

"I imagine," says Charley Hoe Handle, "that it could have somethin' to do with warden's licenses."

"Right the first time," says Horse. "How much did you take the boys for?"

"They got their money's worth."

"Yeah?" says Horse.

"Sure," says Charley. "They knowed, deep down, I couldn't make 'em wardens. But they wanted to believe I could. Everybody what don't like each other—and that's just about everybody—has been spoilin' for a fight anyhow. They put it off on account they didn't want to land in the cooler. But, all tricked out with them shiny papers, s'pose they did get hauled in? They show the justice down at Beaver Junction their paper, say they didn't know any better than to believe it. The justice thinks they're iggerunt hillbillies and lets 'em go."

"How much did you get?" says Horse.

"Sixty-two dollars and fifteen cents," says Charley.

"I want it," says Horse.

"I ain't got it," says Charley.

"You got it in the bank at Beaver Junction," says Horse, "and by coincidence I happen to have a blank check. Here it is. Start writin'."

"And if I don't?" says Charley.

"Then," says Horse, "I personally will tear your ears off right here and use 'em to feed the fish in Cribbidy Crick."

"A reasonable argument," says Charley. "A very reasonable one. I will write."

He sat down, spread the check on his knee, took the indelible pencil he had used to fill in his warden licenses, and wrote. Then he folded the check and gave it to Horse, who took his eyes off Charley for maybe an eighth of a second. It was the weasel's chance, and it was all Charley needed. When Horse looked up, Charley wasn't there any more. Horse unfolded the check Charley had handed him and read—

Pay to the order of Horse Jenkins the right to call himself a game warden—Chas. Hoe Handle

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AT ALL DRUG STORES U.S. AND CANADA

BARGAIN IN BOMBERS

ILLUSTRATED BY
EARL EUGENE MAYAN

By
M. V. HEBERDEN

PAUL WESTON, unofficial agent for the U. S. State Department, arrives at the airport in the capital of one of the Central American "banana republics" immediately after the fatal shooting of a fellow-American, DR. JOHNS—a geologist who had come to the little revolution-ridden country to investigate certain radio-active mineral fields in the mountains nearby. Weston shoots down the gunman—a youth named GARCIA—as he is attempting to kidnap the American consul, MR. ROBERTS. Roberts drives Weston to the American embassy, where he meets the ambassador, HIRAM GENSEN, and the first secretary, JAMES HOME. The detective learns that another geologist, DR. BOWDITCH, in the country for the same purpose as Johns, has been killed recently in the mountains north of Tagalpa, when his mule inexplicably slipped off a precipice. And Weston tells the ambassador of his mission: COLONEL GERARD, of Army Intelligence, having learned that a revolution is in the making, has sent Weston down to investigate the attempted purchase, by an agent of known Communist connections, of war-surplus Navy amphibian bombers. CAPTAIN JEFFRIES, appointed by Gerard as Weston's assistant, has flown one of the big Navy bombers to Tegucigalpa in nearby Honduras and is waiting there for instructions from the detective.

That evening, at the home of HUGH DAYTON, owner of the local airline, Weston runs into an old acquaintance, STEFAN RADETCH, a man of uncertain nationality and loyalties, whom he had known in Spain during the Civil War. Radetch claims to have an interest in one

"Now talk and talk fast, if you want to live," Weston told his kneeling and shaking captive.

of the big local coffee plantations. Weston arranges with Dayton to charter a plane to fly to Tagalpa the next day, and then goes to the Cafe Antigua where he has been informed he can contact an old friend, FREDERICO CALDERON, exiled leader of the PRS—the *Partido Republicano Socialista*. He leaves a message for Calderon and returns to his hotel. But, shortly after, he is picked up by the police and taken to Headquarters for questioning. Lieutenant TERCEIRA shows Weston the body of the man he had shot that morning at the airport and questions him about the incident. Weston insists he did not shoot to kill and voices his suspicion that Garcia has been disposed of by someone who wished to silence him. The American then talks with Police Chief RIOS who accuses him of working with the revolutionaries. Weston denies the charge and counters with an offer to find the rebel leaders and turn them over to the police chief, for a price—$10,000. Rios accepts. . .

PART II

A SMALL plane was waiting when Weston reached the airport. Attached to it was a capable looking redheaded man who, not surprisingly answered to the name of Red O'Bryan. He said, "You the passenger? Let's get going. It's clear now at Tagalpa."

The airfield at Tagalpa was one of the reasons why the opening up of airlines in Central America had been such a hazardous business. It was situated in a cup formed by the mountains along whose side heavy mists had a habit of rolling, further to complicate the task of the pilot. A narrow structure with a corrugated iron roof was all that the airport boasted in the way of buildings.

A tubby man whose hair was thinning on top emerged as they taxied up in front.

"Hiya, Shorty," yelled Red cheerfully. "Got any coffee?"

"Sure. What have you brought?"

"Passenger." The pilot climbed out, Weston after him. "Weston—meet Shorty Hollis. Shorty, this is the guy shot up the airport yesterday or hadn't you heard?"

"Glad to know you, Mr. Weston. Shot up what airport? Don't you know we never hear a damn thing out here in the sticks?"

Red launched into a lurid and inaccurate version of the shooting.

"I don't think you were there," Weston interrupted him dryly.

Hollis looked at him for a moment, shrewd blue eyes sizing him up. "Where's your baggage?"

"Only this." Weston indicated the small bag he had in his hand. "And I want to go back this afternoon if I can."

"Short visit," remarked Hollis. "Like some coffee?"

A few minutes later they were seated in the combined office, operations, freight and radio room.

"They figured this bird must have been behind the bushes in front of the washrooms," explained O'Bryan. "The shot came from there. And it would be the obvious place to hide if you were waiting for someone off a plane. All the passengers go in through that gate there. Almost always in single file."

"What had he against Johns?" asked Hollis.

"Search me." Red looked at Weston. "Did you find out?"

The detective shook his head and asked, "Did you know Johns?"

"He went through here a couple of months back, going into the mountains. Then he came back Sunday and was in a lather to get to the capital. Came and asked me about radioing for a special plane to come and get him. I told him a special job couldn't get out here before the regular Monday plane so he might just as well save his cash."

"Hell of a salesman you are for the company's services," said Red.

"Professors don't usually have much dough."

"Did he say anything about his trip?" asked Weston.

"He said he never did get to see the sacred mountain. Have you heard the story?" As Weston nodded, Shorty went on. "Said nobody actually stopped him. But the Indians just were uncooperative. Said *'No hay camino'* when he asked. Queer yarn, that."

"You believe it?"

Hollis shrugged. Red said, "I've flown over where it is supposed to be hundreds of times and I've never seen anything. Always clouds. It'll be perfectly clear everywhere else but there's a cloud there. There could be a mountain, sacred or otherwise, underneath 'em."

"The country back of here was never

properly mapped until we did it a few years back," explained Hollis. "Even now there are gaps. What's new in the mudhut metropolis, Red?"

"I heard *La Noticia* was raided and closed last night and a fine selection of people who happened to be in the vicinity were chucked in the clink." The pilot paused a moment and added, "And another unattached pilot has been hanging round the field."

"Another?" Hollis' eyes narrowed.

"Yup."

"You don't know who he is?"

"Nope. I gather he's unattached and unexplained. Saw him talking to Jacoves."

"Hitting him for a job, maybe."

"Dunno. Jacoves is the original human clam so probably we'll never know. Hank's come up with a new theory. Figures all these odd pilots that are drifting in are to take over the airforce for the revolution when, as and if D-day comes."

"He's nuts—" said Shorty.

"Would the airforce ever get in the air?" queried Weston idly as the conversation flagged. "Can it?"

"Your point is well taken, stranger. I see you've had experience with Central American airforces." Red dropped his humorous tone and went on seriously. "They've sent three bombers that can fly. I saw them up the other day. And about a dozen pre-war type fighters. Not bad for a little two by four country like this."

"Felipe Camacho, the air minister, is a pilot himself," explained Hollis. "Trained in the U. S. He's done a lot to get the nucleus of an airforce going."

Weston had finished his coffee.

"How do I get into town?" he asked.

"Town, he calls it!" snorted the pilot. "I've a jeep. Red can drive you in."

"Sure. The well-known Dayton airlines luxury service." Red looked out through the door at the ancient jeep. "If it holds together till we hit the village."

"If you want to eat," advised Shorty, "better go to the alleged hotel, the Gran Bretaña, corner of the Plaza opposite the cathedral. It's the best in the place. Give you an idea what the others are like." He tore a sheet off a pad of forms and wrote on the back of it. "If you want to clean up, give that to Jose and he'll let you use my room. It's the only clean shower."

Weston thanked him and started out towards the jeep. "What's the police chief like here?" he asked.

"Propose robbery with violence or just getting drunk and disorderly?" Red wanted to know.

"Almeida?" queried Hollis. "I don't know how his temper will be today if you want to ask him favors."

"Was last night a large night?"

"Not the way you mean. Last Saturday, some bunch tried to have a political meeting in the Plaza. As you know, all public gatherings have been forbidden for ages, so Almedia and the entire police force, including the two mounted ones on their mules, arrived and broke it up. Last night, by the way of reprisals, a bunch of armed men with handkerchiefs over their faces broke into his house and gave him a going-over. He was pretty well battered and vowing vengeance on all and sundry when last heard of. What time are you aiming to go back?"

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"How late can one take off from here?"

"Seven o'clock if it's clear."

"Seven o'clock then. Unless I get through before. In that case I'll be ready to go any time you are."

"The attractions of Tagalpa aren't such that you'll have any difficulty tearing me away from them," Red told him.

"Which reminds me, Red," said Hollis, "stay away from my girl."

"Which one?" demanded Red and jerked the jeep into action. A ribald remark floated after them as they turned into what was by courtesy termed the road into town.

CHAPTER IV

DEATH AND DISORDER

"KNOWN Hollis a long time?" asked Weston carelessly.

"Since the line was opened up. Wish he was operations chief."

"Yes?" Weston said it encouragingly, trying at the same time to avoid being thrown out.

"Good road, ain't it?" asked Red as his nose nearly went through the windshield. "Shorty did more to get this line organized than anyone else—including Dayton himself. And believe me it was tough going. And what's the thanks he gets? Still stuck out here in the middle of nowhere and a guy that's never done a lick of the hard work comes in and gets the good job." After another bump he went on. "Shorty *says* he prefers it down here on his own, away from the red tape in the capital."

"Perhaps he does."

"Yeah, but hell, Dayton might at least have offered him the job. A couple of years back when Golden quit to go in the gold-mining business, I figured he would—but he put Joe Hills in. Well, Joe'd been around as long as Shorty. But when Joe got in a mess and had to get out, I made sure Shorty'd take over. Hell," he ended disgustedly, "he didn't even go after the job. Matter of fact, he recommended Jacoves."

"What happened to Joe Hill?" asked Weston.

"He was running in guns. Of all the dumb things to do. It's O.K. running in some kinds of stuff and all the boys do it but guns get a line into trouble. If Dayton hadn't been such a pal of the president's, we'd have been closed down and taken over by the government. That, and Shorty having discovered it."

"So Dayton is a friend of the president's," murmured Weston.

"If he didn't have the pull he had, half the machines we're using now would be condemned. Shouldn't say that to a customer, I suppose. Except everybody knows it. It's no secret. Did you notice the little job we came out in today?"

"It got here," Weston observed.

"That is because God is good," Red answered sententiously.

"I hope His goodness extends to jeeps."

"Last time I borrowed Shorty's jeep, I ran over two chickens and five different owners turned up to be paid. There," he announced dramatically, waving one hand ahead, "is the thriving town of Tagalpa. On your right, the cathedral, a structure so large that it could easily hold the entire population within a twenty mile radius. There are also some ten other churches—all large. To offset the sanctity, there is a house run by one Madame Zizi, behind the cathedral on property said to be owned by the church. She serves quite good beer, but otherwise—" He broke off his cheerful nonsense as they rounded a final bend in the steep hill between dreary little adobe houses and came into a plaza. "Must be market day."

The usual tired looking women were squatting behind the usual small piles of vegetables and fruit arranged in artistic pyramids. At various stalls people were standing about, eating greasy pieces of chicken drawn from large frying pans which sat awry at dangerous angles over charcoal fires. "Where d'you want to go?" asked Red.

"That's the police station, over there, isn't it? I may as well start there."

"If I'm not around when you want to go back, you can get the station wagon from the hotel to the field. I'll be out there." Red deposited him in front of the police station, turned the jeep and tooting loudly made slow progress round the side of the plaza.

Señor Almedia was adorned with numerous pieces of adhesive tape and gaily painted with mercurochrome as a result of his encounter of the previous night. He listened politely to Weston's rather vague story about the insurance company which wanted further information about the death of Dr. Bowditch before settling the claims of his estate.

The record occupied a page and a half of exquisite copper-plate writing in bright green ink in a huge leather bound book. Denuded of the flourishes, it stated that enroute back from a trip into the mountains to the north, Professor Bowditch's mule had become frightened at a place known as Los Encuentros and that both professor and mule had gone over the edge of the precipice. Affidavits from Miguel Orlando, interpreter, who had witnessed the accident and the mule drivers were available.

"You remember Professor Bowditch coming here?" asked Weston.

"He spoke very little Spanish," reminisced the police chief. "Miguel acted as interpreter for him. There had been another American profesor here since who went in the same direction. If you had arrived a few days earlier you would have met him coming back."

"Dr. Johns," said Weston. "He was killed yesterday when he arrived at the airport."

"Did the airplane fall?"

"Someone shot him."

If the detective had hoped for any useful reaction to this he was disappointed. The chief shook his head and after a suitable pause said, "There is much disorder in the country."

"I see that the señor himself has been having some trouble," said Weston tentatively.

The remark set off a clinical and blasphemous torrent of language. Well though he knew the potentialities of Spanish for profanity, Weston listened in admiration. When he was quite finished describing the ancestry and ultimate destination, not to mention personal habits, of his assailants, the old chief said, "Until this last trouble started, we have had only very slight disorders and unimportant attempts at revolution for the past nine years."

Weston sympathized suitably, obtained the names and addresses of the mule drivers and interpreter, thanked the chief and left. From the first two men whom he located, he got nothing of any use as they had been too far behind to have witnessed the actual accident. "Who hired you?" he asked.

"Miguel Orlando."

ENROUTE to seek out the interpreter, Weston passed by the shop owned by the man who had rented the mules. He went in and explained what he wanted, making his usual vague reference to an insurance company. The little old man pricked up his ears. "It is about time. I have not yet been paid for my mule."

"For the hire of the animals?"

"No, no, señor. For the mule who fell over the precipice. The first one. She was a good mule, young and mild. This gringo who does not understand mules frightens her and lets her fall over a cliff and nobody pays me for her. Now that you are here—"

"What value do you put on her?"

"The other American who hired my mules and who also lost one haggled over the price but he finally paid me the unbelievably small sum of seventy-five pesos."

"Dr. Johns?" queried Weston, reaching for his note case.

"Tall señor, very distinguished. He said that one of my mules became frightened at the same place and nearly took him over the side but that he managed to jump off. Without doubt he did not understand mules or he would have calmed her. Dolores was a wise mule."

"I wonder why she took fright there."

"Without doubt there is a spirit there. Often the animals see things that we cannot."

"It was the mule Dr. Johns was riding?"

"So he said."

"And none of the other mules took fright?"

"Each mule had a driver who led her by carefully, speaking words to calm her."

"Seems odd. I will pay you the same

sum that Dr. Johns paid." Weston gave him the money and left, pondering over the spirit of Los Encuentros and the psychic mules that Americans got to ride.

His next stop was the house where the interpreter lodged. Miguel Orlando was a small, plump man with a highly waxed mustache and no fixed occupation.

"There are no opportunities here, the señor understand, in this backward town!" When Weston mentioned Bowditch's death, he exclaimed, "What a tragedy! I did not know how to come back! How did it happen? The road is very steep and narrow. The cliff goes up and hangs over on one side and on the other is a sheer drop. I was ahead, walking by the mule of the professor. As we came round a bend, the mule became frightened and started to dance on the very brink. I grabbed her bridle, calling to the professor to jump off. But he had lost a stirrup and was leaning to the far side and suddenly he slipped. Without warning the mule lost her footing. I was flung down and barely managed to save myself, holding to the very edge. I looked down. The señor cannot understand my horror."

"Claro," said Weston and felt it was most inadequate at the end of such a fine emotional speech. "I wonder what upset the mule."

"With animals one never knows."

"I have been told there is a spirit there."

"Ah! These foolish people. They believe anything. It is the fault of the priests."

Weston hardly thought that the priests went round instilling beliefs in spirits that lurked on mountainsides and popped out to frighten mules carrying American professors, but he only said, "And Dr. Johns' mule was frightened at the same place."

Miguel drew a sharp breath. "But, *gracias a Dios,* he was a more alert man. He jumped very quickly."

"It seems strange that both their mules took fright there."

"Perhaps the smell of an animal across the path. Perhaps a snake."

"As you say. Who recommended you to Dr. Bowditch and Dr. Johns?"

Miguel shrugged his shoulders. "I do not know, señor. But it is well known that no one else speaks English here." He twirled his mustache complacently. "When there are American tourists, I conduct them."

Privately putting the man down as a liar, from whatever motive, Weston thanked him and made his way back to the plaza from whence all the life and business of Tagalpa radiated. In the telegraph office, fifty pesos convinced the operator that this foreigner had a perfect right to see the file of cables and telegrams that had been sent over the weekend. There weren't many and those there were were not enlightening. There were two signed by Johns; one was a cable to his wife. "Trip finished. Letter follows. Hope be home Saturday. Love." The other was a telegram to Gensen which said, "Return tomorrow. Please make plane reservations U. S. soonest possible."

Feeling his fifty pesos had been wasted, Weston walked over to the Gran Bretaña hotel and bargained for the station wagon. Half an hour later he was enroute to the airport. Until then, beyond noting how cool it was compared to the steaming heat of the capital, he had not considered the weather. He did now and was not encouraged.

Shorty and Red were standing outside when he drove up to the airfield. They both shook their heads. "You're not going to get off tonight unless a miracle happens and they don't happen here," Shorty told him. "When it closes in at this time of day, it stays closed in."

"Clears around 4 A.M.," amplified Red.

Weston looked round. He couldn't see the tops of the mountains. To the south, away from the town, he couldn't even see the mountains for the swirls of misty clouds.

"Quite impossible, is it?" he asked.

"Unless it's a matter of life or death," said Red. "It isn't, is it?"

Weston shook his head. "Just damned inconvenient." He looked at Red curiously and wondered what he would have done had he been told it was a matter of life or death.

"We can stick around until dark and see if it clears, if it'll make you feel

better," Shorty told him. "Won't be long now."

"How sure is it that we can get off early in the morning?"

"We'll take off if I can see the mountains at all," promised Red.

THE THREE of them had a bad dinner, consumed a couple of bottles of tepid beer apiece and ambled round the Plaza, then returned to the bar. Hollis and Bryan talked shop and Weston only half listened. Then a mention of Jacoves made him prick up his ears.

"If he doesn't watch his step he's going to get smacked down one of these days," Red was saying.

"Jacoves is a good man," answered Shorty.

"He knows maintenance. I'll allow him that. But he can't handle pilots. Not like Joe."

"Was Joe Hills running in guns for this bunch of revolutionaries?" queried Weston.

"What do you know about Joe Hills?" asked Shorty.

"I told him—" said Red.

Shorty looked annoyed. "I don't know who he was bringing 'em in for," he said curtly.

"Funny it didn't come out," remarked the detective.

"Joe always claimed he knew nothing about the guns or how they got in the freight station," explained Red, "in spite of the fact that they were consigned to him."

"Says the first he knew of them was when I called him in and asked him just what it was all about," amplified Shorty.

"Joe figured it was a frame engineered by that baby-faced guy in the police chief's office. Trying to impress his boss." Red shrugged. "Wouldn't put it past 'em. And I never did figure Joe'd be so dumb as to try a racket like that."

"Me neither, till I saw the proof," agreed Shorty.

"What became of him?" asked Weston.

"Joe? Went back to the States," said Red.

"Someone said the other day he was in Colombia," said Shorty.

The talk drifted on to other topics, covered the local politics and eventually came back to Professor Johns. Having noticed Miguel Orlando hanging round outside the bar, Weston asked Hollis, "Did you recommend him to Johns as interpreter?"

"Orlando?" Shorty looked surprised and shook his head. "But he usually does act as guide to tourists. Why?"

"I ran across him today," said Weston vaguely, "and he told me in great detail about Bowditch's accident and that Johns had nearly the same accident." He outlined the tale of the mules who saw spirits.

"D'you suppose it's the ghost of another mule they see?" Red wanted to know.

"No information on what kind of spirit it is," Weston told him.

"You should have found out," Red said reprovingly.

"The two mules who saw it are dead so we can't ask them."

"Unless they come back as ghosts and

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tell us." The idea seemed to fascinate Red. "I wonder if ghosts do haunt mules and if mules turn into ghosts. Are there ghosts, anyway?"

"Not on two beers," Shorty told him. "If you're going to see ghosts, better go to bed and see them. It may be clear in the morning and I'll have to wake you—"

"I wake very easily."

"Not earthquake nor cannon, fire nor flood—" began Shorty.

"Or your snoring," interrupted Red rudely.

The room assigned to Weston obviously pinch-hit for a storeroom, for it contained the most amazing quantity of furniture, including three beds, the largest of which had been equipped with a pair of tattered sheets which would have been skimpy on the smallest bed. A number of cockroaches were disporting themselves on the floor; a tribe of ants was rushing hopefully up one of the washstands and the walls were artistically decorated with large, though non-poisonous, spiders. As he was considering the wild life with the help of a sorry kerosene lamp, there was a knock on the door and the proprietor entered, holding in his hand a wooden wedge.

"For the door, señor—" he explained.

Weston had noticed that the door didn't close properly, let alone lock, but as is was a fairly common occurrence in hostelries of that type, the consideration surprised him.

"You heard what happened to the American professor who was here on Sunday?" went on the proprietor.

"Professor Johns?"

"He awoke in the night to find someone pushing his door open. He jumped up to pursue the man but by the time the professor had reached the stairs the unmentionable son of sixty-five thousand whores was already in the street. The Señor Hollis heard the disturbance and came with a gun and fired after him, but he had gone too far. Undoubtedly someone poor who knew there was an American, and therefore a rich man, here. But I would not like the señor to be disturbed in the same manner—" he ended.

When he'd gone Weston put the wedge under the door; he also propped a chair under the door handle before he lay down on the bed and, after one last look at the wild life, slept.

CHAPTER V

TIME TO PRAY

HIS social success somewhat surprised Weston when he arrived back in the capital on Wednesday morning and found a pile of invitations waiting for him at the hotel, including one for dinner at the embassy that evening. There was also a brief cable from Tegucigalpa, Honduras, which simply said "O.K., Jeffries." That meant the pilot had flown the amphibian to San Lorenzo, left it there and was in Tegucigalpa awaiting instructions.

During the morning he had further occasion to reflect on his social success. Mr. Shenaul stopped in to leave an invitation to his exhibition, "Existentialism in Art" and babbled about Picasso and Dali being *démodé*.

"This place would be a dreary wilderness without the Daytons," he said. "Rosa Dayton is one of the few people who realize what's happening in the world today. She knows that the new world is here. It's not something that will come some vague day in the future. It's here now. We're making it."

"And her husband . . . ?" asked Weston.

"He's a good sort, but an ostrich. He doesn't see that the time has gone by when a man can come into one of these countries and build up a one-man airline as he did. Transport belongs to the people. He thinks things are going on forever as they are."

"And you don't?"

"You can't stop progress. The people are awakening. You know, you can't fool all of the people all of the time."

"Not with the same nonsense," agreed Weston, "but I'm not sure it can't be done by judiciously varying the nonsense."

"Eventually they find truth. Perhaps through the medium of literature—a vital literature of the workers. Perhaps through art—an art which brings its message to them." He talked for a long

time. There were a great many words. They didn't mean anything.

Mr. Weinstein of Horizontes Grandes called. He had stopped by yesterday, he said. He would like to print an interview with Mr. Weston in one of his magazines. He would also like to show him the plant; this afternoon, at four. He settled down to talk. He also was taken up with the awakening of the people. He talked a lot of jargon before he left.

Just as Weston thought he'd have a peaceful lunch, Mrs. Dayton appeared, going towards the bar. She saw him and came over. She'd been shopping and was exhausted. Her cook had gone to visit her sick mother, her husband was at the airport and she was going to lunch at the hotel. Weston ordered her a martini and for the next fifteen minutes tried to sidetrack her from lecturing him on the illiteracy in certain parts of the country, the appalling hygenic conditions in other parts, the infant mortality rate and a variety of allied topics. Finally she got to politics.

"Nothing but fascists, this whole government," she snorted. "Hugh gets very cross with me if I say that, but it's true."

"Your husband is a good friend of the president's, isn't he?"

"Because Hugh's opened up the country. The point I'm making is that they wanted it opened up for the benefit of themselves and their little clique. Not for the sake of the people. As for the American colony here—well, I'm ashamed of them. They're not democrats. They're just representatives of big business, monopolies and banks."

Weston smiled, ordered her another martini, and didn't argue. Eventually she got round to Dr. Bowditch. "He came to our house several times," she said, "A very intelligent man. Very interested in conditions here. Mrs. Gensen was saying she thought Dr. Johns was down here on the same mission as Dr. Bowditch. Was he?"

Mentally wondering how much talking the ambassador's wife had done and to whom, Weston countered the question with another. "Was Bowditch down here on a mission?"

"Mrs. Gensen said the ambassador had had instructions to do everything he could for him. There was a bit of a mystery about why he came."

A bellboy came and said there was a man outside with a message. Weston excused himself and went out. A hungry-looking specimen who appeared more than half-Indian was standing in the lobby. The dirty piece of paper he held out contained one sentence: "11:30 P.M. Calle San Jeronimo 14."

He returned to Mrs. Dayton who launched on the evils of the peonage system and the need for education. "All they have is aguardiente and gambling." Then he got it. It was her mention of gambling. The half-Indian who had brought the note had come into the Cafe Antigua on Monday night selling lottery tickets.

HE SPENT the afternoon seeing the Horizontes Grandes establishment. He didn't know very much about printing presses but he knew they were expensive. It was remarkable how the allegedly penniless refugee had, such a short time after his arrival in the country, obtained the capital for them. Mr. Weinstein must be an enterprising businessman.

Weston was shown a pile of publications; magazines which dealt with improving the standard of farming and suggestions for cooperative farms. Books, one of which was written by Weinstein himself under the lurid title of, "I Was Tortured by the Nazis." There was an article on the "Menace of Resurgent Fascism in Europe and America."

"How much longer we'll be able to continue, I don't know," Weinstein said. "They've been rather careful about clamping down on the press but that's over now. They closed *La Noticia* on Monday night. May be our turn next."

They gave him an armful of literature to take back to the hotel. In his room he skimmed hurriedly through some of the magazine articles. The party line was obvious but it was confined to generalities and references to happy workers in the happy Soviet Republic. Weston concluded that Horizontes Grandes was careful not to print anything immediately applicable to local conditions. He

piled them on the dresser, frowning. Horizontes Grandes was too obvious to act as "front." He moved restlessly round the room. Time was passing and he was getting nowhere fast. With an effort he threw off a feeling of futile frustration.

He went to the window and looked out. A thin, depressed-looking man who had been outside Horizontes Grandes when he'd left was standing now in the doorway of a shoemaker's shop opposite. Weston dressed hurriedly for dinner, looked out again, saw the man was still there, and went down to the lobby, where there were telephone booths with direct lines. He called the police chief.

"Are you having me followed?"

Rios was indignant. "I gave you my word that I would not interfere with you."

"That doesn't answer my question. You could have me followed without interfering with me."

"But I am not having you followed, señor."

"Good. That's all I wanted to know." Weston looked at his watch. He had plenty of time before the embassy dinner. Outside, he took the first cab he saw. "Cross the road and stop by the shoemaker's shop," he told the driver.

The depressed-looking man had already begun to move. Weston spoke sharply to his driver, who jammed on the brakes. The detective opened the door, reached out and said, "Get in—"

The light was bad, for it grows dark early. But a lamp in the shop shone out onto the blueblack of his automatic. The watcher gave a half strangled gulp but he got in. "Drive out toward the airport," ordered Weston.

His captive looked even more lean and depressed as he huddled in the far corner of the cab, nervously twisting the end of his shirt in dirty, bony fingers. As soon as they turned off the main street, Weston said, "Who sent you?"

"Señor, I was just standing—"

"Who sent you?"

"I don't know anything."

"If you don't remember something pretty fast, you're going to have a nice funeral." In the darkness the safety catch made an ominous click.

"But not in my car, señor. It is new and furthermore, I cleaned it today." The chauffeur looked anxiously round.

"You watch the road. I wouldn't dream of messing up your car. I shall undoubtedly put this idiot out onto the road when I am ready to kill him."

"The señor is a *caballero,*" sighed the driver contentedly.

"I have done the señor no harm," wailed the captive.

"The sight of you following me depresses me. What's your name?"

"Benedito."

"Even so, Benedito, I might spare your miserable life if you tell me who sent you."

"Señor, I have a wife, eight children, my mother and my grandmother."

"Then death can have no terrors. Driver, there's a side road here. Turn up it."

"But it only goes two or three kilometers, señor, and then ends in a field," the chauffeur told him.

"That will do very nicely," said Weston. Benedito was muttering prayers. "It is said," continued the detective conversationally, "that heaven helps those who help themselves. Instead of praying for an improbable miracle, tell me who sent you and perhaps I'll let you go."

Benedito understood about half. He stopped praying and at last managed to say, "They kill traitors."

"Who kill them?"

"Señor, have mercy." Somehow Benedito managed to get to his knees in the cab, which stopped at the same minute.

THE detective leaned over, opened the door behind him and pushed him out. He stumbled and began looking round. "It's no good trying to run. I shoot well. Remember the airport."

Benedito fell to his knees again. Weston got out and held his hand to the driver. "Better give me the key."

The chauffeur, whose eyes were riveted to the gun, handed it over without comment.

Weston turned back to his kneeling and shaking captive. "Get on your feet and walk. That's far enough. Now talk and talk fast, if you want to live."

For some seconds Benedito started into the dark face above him. It was sharply shadowed for Weston kept the beam of his torch on his victim. Benedito could hardly see the black eyes that he knew were there, but he could feel them drilling into him. It was as if they drained him of all volition. Perhaps the man was a mesmerist, aided by the devil. Perhaps it was the devil. Confused ideas flitted through his superstitious brain. Then the level, almost bored voice with its very slight foreign accent was speaking again.

"You say that 'they' will kill you if you betray them. They've got to catch you first. But I am here now and from me you have no escape."

"They said that if we obeyed, the coffee *fincas* would be ours," he said at last in a mournful voice.

"Who told you that?"

"A man who spoke to us. A great señor." Benedito gulped and added, "But he also said that traitors would die."

"Who is this man?"

There followed a lot of information about the rosy pictures that the great señor had held before their eyes but nothing about the man himself. A friend had come to Benedito one day and said that, in the future, all men could be *finqueros* if they were wise now. Benedito, who was a street vendor of lottery tickets, would much have preferred to be a *finquero* and had asked how he might be wise now. His friend had taken him to a meeting of other would be *finqueros* in a un-used warehouse behind the electric power station. There the great señor had made them a rousing speech, asked each man a few questions about himself and family and given each a number.

When they had a job for him, a man would come and speak to him as he fetched his day's quota of tickets from the agency of Señor Munjoz, say his number and then give him his instructions. He would report in the same manner.

"Always the same man?" asked Weston.

"No, señor. Always different."

"Don't you know who any of them were at all?"

"Always strangers, señor."

"Foreigners?"

"Oh no, señor."

"How many other men do this work that you know of, that is, besides yourself?"

But Benedito only knew the friend who'd asked him if he wanted to be a *finquero* and one other. Weston knew the man was too frightened to have invented the entire circumstantial story but it wasn't much help with the short time he had available. It sounded like the usual set-up for a movement of its kind; groups of three or four men known to each other, only one of whom knew the next rank above who in turn knew three or four of their own rank and so on, according to the size of the organization. Benedito's abject misery annoyed him.

He said to him irritably, "Get up on your feet. I'm not going to kill you at present."

"It is not only what the señor may do,

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it is my record," mumbled the miserable Benedito.

"Your record?"

"When I have followed men before they have not discovered."

"What men have you followed in your work?"

"There was the President's aide, Colonel Portello. For a week I followed him and he did not know. Then there was Padre Conego but that I did not like, feeling that it might be unlucky to follow a priest though they told me that he had no more power than other men. After him was an American called Es-stagg. And him I followed for five days until he took the plane and left."

Weston smiled grimly. So it wasn't only the police, after all, that had got Stagg tabbed.

"And now the señor sees me on the first day," Benedito ended.

Weston produced some bills from his pocket. "Leave the capital for a long time. Get going, Benedito, and keep going. If I see you in the capital, I shall kill you and so will your ex-comrades if they see you first. So you undertsand that it will be much wiser for you to stay away."

Benedito understood. He went. Weston returned to the cab and handed the driver the key. "Back to town," he ordered. As the man turned, he said, "Whom do you report to?"

"Señor, if anyone with a gun questions me, I report to him. Otherwise, I do not report."

"Very practical. I don't think you've noticed anything unusual happen on this ride, have you? You took a tourist for a ride to get some air. It's been very hot today."

"A tourist who admires so much the beauties of nature."

"Don't make it too elaborate."

"There is nothing unusual in that. Often tourists seem to get into my cab without knowing where they want to go."

"Right. Take me to the American Embassy."

In front of the gate, Weston paid him off. He looked at the bills and said, "Any time the señor wants to enjoy a drive in the cool night air, he should ask for cab forty-two. Jesus Morales."

CHAPTER VI

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

A LITTLE before eleven-thirty, Weston walked along the Calle San Geronimo, which was behind the market. Number fourteen turned out to be another little cafe, less inviting even than the one where he had sat on Monday night. Once again the coffee was better than the surroundings. He drank several cups. Half past eleven came and went. It was ten to twelve when a man with a mauve and green striped shirt came in, walked straight up to him and said, "We had to be sure the señor was not followed. The señor is to come with me."

Stripe-shirt led him to a car that was parked by the corner of the market. Blinds were drawn. He'd more or less expected that. He got in without comment and Stripe-shirt followed. The car was moving almost before the door was closed. Weston took cigarettes from his pocket, lighted one and in the flickering glow from his lighter, offered the packet to Stripe-shirt.

The man looked doubtful for a moment, then took one and said, "But I am not to answer any questions."

Weston smiled into the darkness and said, "I don't know what questions your boss thought I might ask you."

"He said you would want to know where we were going and who you are to meet."

"When we arrive, I'll find out whom I meet and as to where we're going, it doesn't matter much," replied Weston amiably. The car bumped violently and he added, "As long as we get there alive."

"The señor need not worry. Jorge is a very careful driver. This road is bad. But they have already started the repair work."

"Must have been long overdue," said the detective as another bump nearly sent him through the roof.

"The roads have been much improved recently." Injured civic pride spoke in Stripe-shirt's tone.

"Not this one."

"This is a working men's *barrio*, señor. That is why it has been a long time before they started to mend it."

They had come off the cobbled road now into something that felt like a bad dirt road. Jorge, the careful driver, stopped with a jerk that nearly unseated his passengers and the door was opened. The darkness was almost impenetrable. A man was standing, holding the car door open. He said, "Go in."

Weston walked into a room illuminated by a hurricane lantern whose wick was badly trimmed. The place was hung with draperies which gave it the appearance of a fortune teller's booth at a country fair. The only visible furnishings were a table flanked by two chairs. All it needed was the crystal ball to make the illusion complete. The lantern showed the young man who had bidden him enter as a stockily built half-Indian, unremarkable in appearance save for a large mole above his right eye; the mole supported a tuft of very black hair which stood upright like an exclamation point. He said, "Will you sit down? I am to ask you questions."

"Why do people who work for causes lose their sense of the ridiculous?" asked Weston as he sat and watched the young man unfold a sheet of paper and then seat himself opposite.

The exclamation point on the young man's forehead wiggled reproachfully; he seemed nervous. Further on in the interview, Weston realized that he had to squint to read in the bad light and that each time he frowned, the mole executed a contortion of its own. Now he cleared his throat, referred to the paper and said, "Señor, you have expressed a wish to interview Don Frederico Calderon. Why?"

"He is a friend of mine and I have a proposition to make to him that I think will interest him."

The young man read from his paper. "What is the nature of your business with him?"

"I'll tell him when I see him."

"What guarantee have we that you are not an informer in the pay of the police?"

"None that I know of. What guarantee have I that you are not?"

To judge from the young man's expression that could not have been the right answer. He frowned anxiously at his paper and read, "What passed between you and the police chief in secret early on Tuesday morning?"

"Rios had ideas about deporting me because some—" Weston hesitated a moment, then went on—"informer had told him I was a friend of Calderon's. I talked Rios out of it."

"How do we know that you are telling the truth?"

"You don't, but what right have you to ask questions? Who are you?" Weston looked negligently round at the draperies. "Really, when you put on a show like this, you can't expect me to take it very seriously."

THE young man looked utterly confused and consulted his paper while the exclamation point executed a furious jig on his forehead.

"The services of the prompter seem to be needed," Weston suggested. "Better go behind the curtain and get instructions as to what to say next."

The young man rallied a bit. He'd found something applicable. "You must realize that Don Frederico is an old man. He is proscribed by the present regime. We have made it our business to protect him. Unless we know why you want to see him we cannot decide whether or not to permit it."

"I don't think Don Frederico will thank you for making his decisions for him," said Weston.

Someone sneezed behind the curtain. He glanced in the direction of the sound and said, "Seems to be a lot of hay fever around here."

The young man looked up and down his paper which evidently provided no inspiration. Weston reached a lazy hand across the table and before his intention was divined, had taken it. "If you'd left this questionnaire at my hotel, I'd have filled it out for you." His eyes were quickly scanning the questions. "No to number three and—" He broke off as the young man snatched it from him.

A sharp double rap came from behind the draperies. The young man sprang to his feet and said, "I warn you not to move. It would be very unwise of you to try to find out anything about this house."

"So I gathered," said Weston dryly, indicating a section of the drapery to his right. He had been aware for some time that he was being watched through a slit in it; the slit would accommodate a gun very conveniently.

The young man retreated. Weston heard the shuffling of a number of feet, then a door closed. Perhaps five minutes passed before he heard the click of the door opening, and then the young man reappeared.

"What is your objection to telling us your business with Don Frederico?" was the next question.

"I don't know who you are and I'm not in the habit of telling my business to people I don't know anything about. And second, my business with him is confidential." Weston moved restlessly in the chair. "You might as well make up your minds to the fact that if you want to know my business with Calderon, you'll have to arrange for me to see him. Perhaps he'll tell you about it afterwards, if you're such friends of his."

"You could be forced to tell us. You were not followed here."

Weston smiled thinly. "I shouldn't get ideas like that if I were you. Furthermore, it wouldn't do you a bit of good knowing. Now, if you've the common sense to ask Calderon if he'd like to talk to me and be guided by what he says, you'll save us all a lot of trouble." He got up and the young man looked alarmed. "Don't be nervous. Just tell your driver to take me back to the hotel."

"A moment, señor." The young man fled precipitately behind the curtain. There was a whisper and he returned. "I am to give you these instructions. Take the plane tomorrow morning toTagalpa. It leaves at 6:30. There will be a ticket for you at the airport. In Tagalpa, go to the Hotel Gran Bretaña. You will receive further instructions there."

"Do I get to see Don Frederico at the end of the trip?"

The young man didn't aswer but went on repeating as if he had learned by heart, "You will tell no one of your trip and you will go alone. Do not communicate with anyone between now and when the plane goes. Remember, you are watched."

"I disposed of him," Weston said carelessly.

"What?"

"Benedito or whatever his name was. The sight of him hanging round depressed me. I didn't know he belonged to you," he finished mendaciously. "I thought he was police."

The young man swallowed, looked helplessly at the curtain and then gave it all up. "You agree not to try to communicate with anyone before the plane goes?"

"I agree. I'd like some sleep."

"Very well. *Feliz viaje,* señor. Jorge—Heime—"

The front door opened and Stripe-shirt appeared. Weston followed him out to the car. When they'd started he gave Stripe-shirt another cigarette and inquired casually, "D'you sell lottery tickets?"

"The señor would like one? Fifty thousand pesos, drawn on Friday." Stripe-shirt's voice was eager. "One peso each section. Ten pesos the whole ticket."

For a second the curtain behind the driver's seat was pushed aside and Jorge's voice said, "That is forbidden.

"It cannot hurt to do a little business. It is not answering questions," argued Stripe-shirt. By the time the transaction was complete, they were on the corner opposite the Gran Hotel.

SHORTY HOLLIS looked mildly surprised to see Weston climb out of the mixed passenger and cargo plane and said, "Tagalpa must have charms I'd overlooked."

The detective went to the Gran Bretaña and sat in the bar with a bottle of warm beer on the table in front of him to pay for his seat and read the newspapers he had brought. By lunchtime he had exhausted them and went into the restaurant and tackled the greasy soup, an even more greasy chicken and rice and was drinking his coffee when Jose came to tell him that a car had arrived for him.

A station wagon was outside. The driver, a very cheerful-looking ruffian, bumped him for an hour over a moutain road which he proudly announced as

being a part of the Pan American Highway. They turned off onto a side road that was worse and after another hour navigating through lakes of mud, descended a gentle slope past terraces for grading and drying coffee to a cleared strip at the foot of the terraces where a small sport plane was waiting. Radetch was standing beside it.

"How d'you like the coffee *finca*?" he asked.

"Looks pretty good, what I could see from the road. I had a feeling that coffee wouldn't keep you contented very long."

"That your bag?" Radetch turned to another man. "Put it in, Alfonso. As a matter of fact, Weston, nothing would please me no better than to settle down on a coffee *finca* and do nothing else for the rest of my days. Just run in it a comfortably feudal manner."

"Tut-tut. Suppose your fellow ideologists heard such heresy?"

"Alfonso doesn't understand English." Radetch nodded to the man who had stowed his bag inside and who enjoyed the distinction of being the first happy-looking well-fed son of the revolution that the detective had seen. Radetch pointed to one of the rear of the four seats. "Sorry, but I'll have to blindfold you. And guns are not permitted."

Weston shrugged his shoulders and passed over his gun. "You're the most nervous bunch I've ever dealt with. I suppose I should be flattered."

"If I'd had my way, you wouldn't be brought out here at all," Radetch told him.

"Is that why you told Rios I was a friend of Calderon's?"

"I don't know what your game is yet. But I don't trust you any more than—any more than—" Radetch was busy tying the blindfold and couldn't think of a simile.

"Than I trust you," finished Weston for him.

"That's about it."

Before the blindfold had been fastened, the detective had looked at his watch—2:48 P.M. He thought they'd been up about an hour when they landed rather bumpily and Radetch's voice was saying, "You can take it off. Anything you see you had better forget. Not that it would matter much as you don't know where you are."

When his eyes accustomed themselves to the glare, Weston climbed out and found himself in another valley. Only this time the mountains were not so high and the vegetation was completely tropical. A stand of bamboo and a group of coco palms made him realize that he was at sea level. It was a small valley and the only available flat space had been leveled off to make this landing field which was just large enough to accommodate the little plane. He looked at his watch and found his guess had not been far out—3:58. They'd taken seventy minutes all together. He threw a glance towards the sun.

Weston grinned and shook his head. "It's a pretty retreat."

Radetch grunted as if he didn't agree. "Damned insects are enough to drive you nuts. Particularly after five. Come on. You didn't come to admire the scenery."

The heat was stifling, even in the shade. A series of very temporary looking buildings, thrown together from

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bamboo, palm and flimsy planks were ranged in double rows at either side of the landing field. Two squads of men who had been standing waiting, moved onto the field and started close order drill. The hum of machinery came from a big workshop under the open shelter of a palm thatch roof. A mast announced the presence of a radio station.

Radetch was leading him to the right where a group of somewhat more tidy wooden structures stood. Several men with rifles were leaning against whatever would support them in whatever patch of shade they could find. The sight of Radetch set them to apathetic pacing of their posts.

Some men had come to the door of one of the buildings and were watching them. Upon closer approach, Weston recognized the foremost of the three from pictures he had seen of the exiled communist party leader, Lucio Bustellos. His bull head was almost bald and what hair he had was cropped very close. An outthrust chin gave him some of the look of one of the late Signor Mussolini's less flattering portraits. He acknowledged Radetch's introduction of Weston courteously and said, "Don Frederico has told me a great deal about you. He is looking forward to seeing you."

"How is he?" asked Weston.

"Well, but frail. He is, you understand, an old man. Only his great love of his country has brought him to help us, quite against his doctor's orders. He knows the risk but he is a true patriot and he accepts it." Weston felt rather nauseated as the smooth voice went on. "But any shock might prove fatal."

"How convenient," murmured Weston.

"I don't quite understand."

"No?" Weston looked up and the veiled mockery of his eyes met the hard probing of Bustellos'.

"I think we shall get along very well together. Come now and we will go to Don Frederico."

The two smaller men who seemed to be a bodyguard fell into step behind Bustellos who walked past two wooden buildings to a third, smaller one, where he stopped. A soldier with a Springfield rifle was on duty at the door. Bustellos knocked, then opened the door.

CHAPTER VII

LEADER IN EXILE

FOR an instant Weston hesitated in the doorway. He had been prepared for the years to have made a change but even so, he was shocked. He had last seen Frederico Calderon a vigorous middle-aged man, alive with the vibrant magnetism that had made men willing to follow him to prison, exile or death. Now he saw the shell of a man, old and tired. Calderon stood up behind the table at which he had been writing, his thin blue-veined hands using it to help him rise from his chair. His hair was quite white now and the pale, bloodless flesh seemed only a parchment spread over the wide intellectual forehead and the finely-chiseled features. He said, "Welcome, Paul Weston. It's been a long time."

The detective, his well-schooled features showing nothing but conventional pleasure at meeting an old friend, went forward to take the frail hand. "A very long time."

They sat down, the four of them. The two smaller men remained standing, just inside the door. Bustellos offered cigarettes. Getting them lighted bridged over a gap when no one seemed ready to say anything. Finally Bustellos asked, "Any news from Tagalpa, Stefan?"

"They've lost another truck," Radetch told him sourly.

"What happened?"

"Went over the cliff. Don't know what's the use of giving those damn fools trucks, the way they handle them."

"Your roads do seem a bit dangerous," commented Weston.

"Huh?" Bustellos looked up suspiciously.

"Trucks go over cliffs. American geologists' mules see ghosts and go over cliffs. Very dangerous." Weston's impenetrable black eyes again locked with Bustellos' hard ones.

"Oh." Bustellos seemed relieved. "You're thinking of that professor. What was his name? Bowditch. Too bad about that. A clever man, I believe, though I never met him."

Conversation flagged. Radetch moved

restlessly as if he wanted to go. Weston smoked placidly. He had long ago discovered that silence got on most people's nerves and that, in order to break it, they would do or say anything; quite often the thing he wanted them to do or say. It was a question of out-waiting them. This time he didn't have to wait long.

Bustellos said, "As we're all here, we may as well get down to business. What's your proposition, Weston?"

"Proposition?"

"That you wanted to see Don Frederico about?" Bustellos spoke impatiently.

"I'll tell him about it later."

"You needn't worry about us. We're all comrades here—united in the same struggle. We've no secrets from each other."

"In which case, Don Frederico will doubtless tell you all he wishes to, afterwards." There was finality under the smooth words.

A good many thoughts were going through Bustellos' mind during the silence that followed and Weston could guess most of them. Radetch's face reflected a certain amusement and an unspoken "I told you so." Calderon waited with a patience which might have been wisdom or the tiredness of age. The spell was broken by the entrance of an enormously powerful, middle-aged Indian with a scarred face.

"Don Pablo! It is indeed good to see you." He greeted Weston with a depth of feeling, taking his hand between his powerful ones and looking for a moment hard into the detective's face.

Weston remembered well the devoted and privileged servant who was Calderon's shadow. He said, "Tomas, I felt that you would not be far from Don Frederico."

"Never, God willing." Tomas glanced for a second from Weston to Bustellos and Radetch and went through into the inner room, leaving the detective wondering what lay behind the enigmatic look he had given the two men.

Radetch's voice interrupted his speculations. "I don't have to be knocked down to take a hint. I'll be seeing you later, Weston."

Bustellos had made his decision. He stood up. "We'll leave these two old friends to have a chat. When you've finished, Weston, come to my office in the next building."

Weston nodded casually as if he had taken it for granted all along that he would win his point and watched them go. Bustellos reminded him unpleasantly of a cat when it is quite sure that the mouse can't get away and is in no hurry to make its kill. In spite of the bulldog Mussolin chin, he had soft speech and a feline strength in his movements.

Calderon smiled and said, "And now, my friend, you can tell me why you've come."

"Tell me what's been happening to you. It's been so long."

"They've been sad years, Paul. People have been kind to me, but it is bitter to live in exile when one's own land is suffering."

WESTON got up and ranged round the room. He stood at the small opening, innocent of glass, shutter or screen that served as a window as the old man's voice told of men whom he had known, now dead or in prison, and of the futile and costly attempts to unseat the dictator.

"But this time we will not fail, Paul. This time it will not be men and boys going with their naked hands against troops armed with the latest equipment. This time our men will have something to fight with."

"That means civil war."

Calderon shook his head. "The army is loyal to the regime only because it feels itself supreme. Once let them see that they are matched in the field and they will not continue fighting," he said with weary cynicism.

"Perhaps you're right, Don Frederico. I don't know. But even if you are—" Weston was looking at the gaps between the badly sawn boards where the sunlight made bars of light on the packed dirt floor. He picked up an old-fashioned file of the type contrived by a piece of strong wire, pointed and fixed to a wooden base, removed the papers from it and started to play with it, wandering round again.

"What are you thinking of, Paul?" Calderon asked at last.

Suddenly, as he ranged round, Weston bent a little and jabbed the file through the gap between two of the planks. He jabbed it hard. An unearthly screech of agony came from outside. Calderon jumped to his feet. "What—" he began.

For answer, Weston held the file in front of him. The pointed tip was bloody. The screams continued. The soldier on duty in front was shouting as he ran around. Weston opened the door. Several men were coming out of the next building, among them Bustellos.

A man staggered around the corner of the house, holding his hand to his ear. His other arm was flailing in the air. He came blindly and without sense of direction, venting his hoarse animal screams with each step. His knees buckled and he fell forward on his face.

The guard stood with his mouth open. The men who'd emerged from the neighbor building were also transfixed with horror. Bustellos looked slowly from the fallen man to Weston and again their eyes looked. Bustellos' voice when he spoke was controlled. "Take him to the doctor and then lock him up."

Weston stepped back inside and closed the door. Calderon was seated at the table, his head bent on his hands. Weston sat down and didn't speak. He had a decision to make and it wasn't an easy one. He knew now what he had suspected during the farcial questioning of the previous night. Frederico Calderon was a prisoner, whether he knew it or not. Perhaps he had not yet realized how he was being used; used for the value of his name to make the people fight. And afterwards, when the fighting was over, he'd disappear. They wouldn't kill him. They were too smart to make a martyr. It would probably be reported that his health had collapsed. Regardless of whether Calderon realized these things or not, it was too late for him to stop the forces that he had helped start, even if he would.

"And if you succeed this time," Weston said at last, "and Bustellos seizes power and manages to get his regime recognized, what then?"

Calderon raised his head. He looked even more haggard and frail now. "There well be an election within sixty days. Bustellos believes that the Communists will sweep the field. But I know my people, Paul. The Workers' Party will support our PRS candidate, Alberto Tamis. The merger of the two parties will outnumber the Communists three to one. And the Nacionalistas can always be counted on to vote against the Communists."

"And you really believe that Bustellos will do all this—" Weston waved his hand towards the working and drilling men outside—"take all the risks, spend the money and then let Alberto Tamis walk into Government Palace? Moscow doesn't work that way, my friend."

"Moscow!" The old man snorted angrily. "Are you hypnotized by this nonsense that all Communist parties throughout the world are run from Moscow? I thought you were more clear-headed."

Weston didn't answer. He knew the uselessness of logical arguments in such cases. "Let us leave Moscow out of it for the moment, then. I'll put my question a different way. Do you think that any man will do all this work, take all the risks and then let another man take the power? Forget Moscow and think of human nature."

"Bustellos is a very able man, Paul, but like all able men he has his blind spot. He underestimates the power of the Church and its opposition to Communism. He fully believes that the election will return him to power. He has no shadow of doubt about it. Does that answer your question?"

"Partly. He could believe the election will return him to power because he intends to make sure that it will."

"What d'you mean?"

"There have been a number of elections in the country under the present regime," Weston reminded him.

"They have not been free elections! They have been tragic farces. You know enough about affairs here to know that."

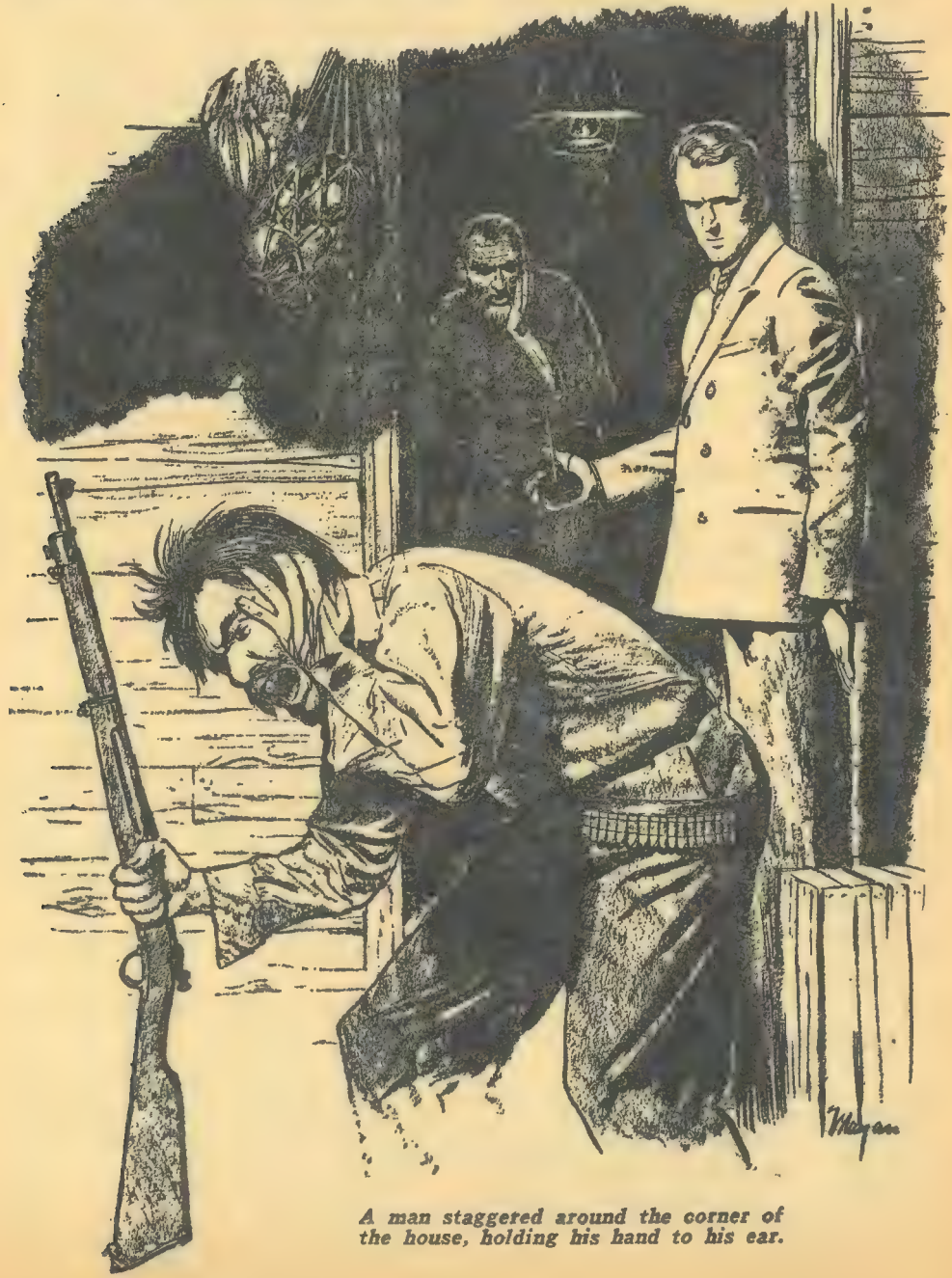
"Exactly. And you think this will be a free and fair one?"

"I do."

"And you believe that, if it goes against him, Bustellos will relinquish the power?"

"He will only be the head of a temporary junta composed of him, Tamis and myself. He'll take it hard, I'm afraid. But he'll have to abide by the decision of the people."

Weston felt utterly depressed. Calderon, when he had known him, had had one of the keenest intellects of his day. He had been the match and more of any man or group of men. Now, age and illness had laid their hand heavily on him. He was blinded by his own desires, by his life-long ambition to see a real democracy in his country before he died.



A man staggered around the corner of the house, holding his hand to his ear.

"Bustellos and I do not agree on many things," he went on after a while, "but on one thing we do. We mean to see our people free, God willing." He gave a wry smile. "The fight for freedom makes strange bedfellows. Your country discovered that during the war."

"If people were sure that their definitions of freedom and democracy were the same," retorted Weston dryly, "they'd have less illusions about their bedfellows and less unpleasant surprises later on." A bit later, he asked casually, "Where does Bustellos get his financial backing?"

"Friends have been generous. Here, in Honduras, in Mexico and in the U. S."

"But you've never seen a detailed statement of what he has raised and where?"

Calderon shook his head. "But you did not come all this way to argue with me, my friend."

"I heard that your agents had tried to buy amphibian bombers from the War Assets."

"There was trouble about the export licenses."

Weston smiled. "U.S. doesn't like selling bombers unless they know where they're going, who wants them and what for."

"The more strength we can show, Paul, the less fighting there will be."

"A couple of raids with a half dozen of those planes and you could about wipe out the capital; all that counts. There is no anti-aircraft."

"No bombs will be dropped except in a last extremity and then only on garrisons and only after warning." For a moment the old man's voice had recovered the ring of authority.

"It's not my worry what you do with them."

"You—you mean you could get one for us?"

"I can deliver you six."

FOR a moment Calderon stared unbelievingly then his whole face lighted up. It was transfigured. Weston thought vaguely of Moses seeing the promised land and remembered that Moses had never got there.

"D'you realize what this means, Paul? You have put success into our hands."

Weston listened to the plans, the dreams, the gratitude and each word rasped across his taut nerves like a file. He wanted to cry out and say, "I have come to use your friendship to betray you." But he was silent. How much did it matter who wielded the power in this most backward of Central American republics? And he saw in his mind Gerard's harassed face when he had finished explaining, heard again his words, "It must not happen." He could go back and say he'd failed. It would be perfectly plausible. Even Gerard would not suspect. When he had complained that the task sounded impossible at this late date, the colonel had simply said, "I know. But do your best."

His every instinct urged Weston to stand by his friendship for this man whose ideals he admired. There is a debt of honor in friendship. He realized that Calderon had stopped speaking and was looking at him.

"What's the matter, Paul?"

Weston passed his hand over his eyes. "Nothing, Don Frederico. I'm very tired." And he had never spoken a truer word. A little later, he said, "You realize, the deal is a financial one. Strictly speaking, the planes are not mine. The man who owns them commissioned me to contact the right people."

"Naturally. Come, we will talk to the others."

When they entered the other building, they found Radetch seated in an office with Bustellos and a third man whom he introduced as "Señor Tamis, recently returned from exile." So this was the PRS candidate, thought Weston, as Calderon explained excitedly about the planes.

"How did you get them?" asked Bustellos.

"There are ways. The man I'm representing knows them."

"Can you get export licenses?"

"You need not concern yourself about the delivery, Señor Bustellos. But as I was explaining to Don Frederico, airplanes are not given away."

"We know the price."

"You know the price on the field in Texas if you could have flown them away," Weston corrected him.

"You're looking for a commission, aren't you?"

"Naturally. My friend did not buy them to oblige you. He has not the slightest interest in your cause."

"Who is he?"

"People who know how to obtain things such as export licenses sometimes prefer to remain anonymous."

"But you can't expect us to do business with someone who remains anonymous."

"You're doing business with me." Weston paused long enough for that to sink in and then quoted the price.

"Making a pretty good profit, aren't you?" asked Tamis.

"That is exactly why I went into the deal."

"If you knew him as well as I do," put in Radetch, "you'd know he was never in anything that did not show a good profit."

"You flatter me. How about it, gentlemen? Is it a deal?"

They wrangled for some time while Weston maintained a politely interested expression and said, "Take it or leave it. It is quite easy to dispose of them if you don't want them. A surprising number of people want bombers. To convert for commercial use, of course."

"Of course," agreed Radetch quite solemnly.

"I've heard that the present government here is interested."

"Paul, you wouldn't—" began Calderon.

Weston frowned at him and said, "Try to persuade your friends that what I'm asking is a fair return for the trouble and risk. You must be aware that at the moment your—shall we say—ideological affiliations are not very popular."

Bustellos glanced at Radetch. "It will have to be taken up with the treasurer." There was a faint hesitation before the last word, so faint that Weston wondered if he had imagined it.

"How long will that take?"

Bustellos looked at his watch. "We will have an answer this evening for you. If the price is satisfactory, when can you deliver?"

"Three this week. Three next."

Radetch looked surprised. "Takes a bit of time to ferry those babies down from U.S."

"Did I say they were coming from U.S.?" asked Weston.

"Where are they?" Bustellos wanted to know.

Weston ignored the question. "I shall require payment in U.S. currency when each plane is handed over to whoever is authorized to take possession of it."

"It would be easier to make one payment when they have all been delivered," said Tamis.

"Possibly, but in business one must take precautions."

"You do not appear to trust us," said Bustellos.

"It seems to be mutual," said Weston.

"The agent who looked at the planes in Texas said the bomb racks have been dismantled," said Radetch.

Weston nodded. "However, bomb racks are available and have been bought. They are included in that price. It is a simple job to replace them, I understand." Remembering the lecture he had received from the pilot, Jeffries, on the habits of the particular type of amphibian bomber, he continued, "Incidentally, they can't land out there on that inch and a half where we put down."

Radetch smiled. "They aren't expected to, so don't worry."

Bustellos got up, signifying the end of the session. "Quarters are ready for you. Stefan will show you. We don't want to spoil your stay here, but we would rather you did not talk to any of the men and don't walk beyond the sentry posts. Sorry to limit you in any way," he concluded smothly, "but as you yourself said, one must take precautions."

Radetch guided him past the house occupied by Calderon towards a long thatched building consisting of a narrow veranda with a row of doors leading off it. Each gave entrance to a small cubicle containing a canvas cot and a table contrived from bamboo poles and woods from packing cases. "Got a towel?" As Weston nodded, he went on, "Latrine and bath up the path at the back. We eat dinner at six. It's nearly time."

"Where's the mess hall?"

"The other end of the same building where the office is. See you there."

CHAPTER VIII

VAYA CON DIOS

THE mess hall reserved for the use of the leaders was quite small. There were two tables, each seating eight people. When Weston arrived a man showed him to a seat next to the head of one of them. A few minutes later Calderon appeared and sat at one end and Bustellos came and took the seat next to the detective.

It was not a pleasant meal. As far as the food was concerned, the leaders of the underprivileged peasants did themselves very well on the more expensive varieties of canned gods. But conversation was difficult. And all the time with one ear, Weston was listening to the talk coming from the table behind him which seemed to be in almost every variety of European language except Spanish.

Several times as he was drinking his coffee, Bustellos consulted his watch. A few minutes before seven, he got up and said, "Come on, Stefan." He turned to Weston. "I'll be back in a little while with the decision you are waiting for. I'm sure you'll enjoy talking to your old friend, Don Frederico." It was a scarcely veiled order to remain and at the same time Bustellos had bent a meaningful glance on Alberto Tamis who nodded and picked his teeth in a frenzy of hygienic vigor.

Weston affected not to notice their exchange of glances. He brought cigarettes from his pocket and said, "Do you still play chess, Don Frederico?"

"Sometimes, with Señor Bustellos." Calderon asked one of the waiters to bring the chess set.

They played, while Tamis watched, at intervals asking questions about the game. He had, it seemed, once been shown the moves and was convinced that, with a minimum of practice he could become a champion. Half an hour later, Bustellos returned. Bustellos stood for a few minutes, watching the progress of the game, listening to Weston's good-natured explanations of his strategy.

"Y'know, Tamis, if you make Weston explain why he makes all his moves, he hasn't much chance of winning," he said at last. "Weston, your price has been agreed on. Also your delivery terms. When can you deliver the first?"

"Where is it to be delivered?" asked Weston.

"Where are they?"

"I read in the newspaper the other day that an airplane had been stolen. I wouldn't like that to happen to one of mine before it's been paid for."

Bustellos laughed, and it was not a laugh of whole-hearted mirth. "You don't even trust your own side."

"I pick a side because it pays well, not because of its business ethics or its moral scruples."

"You and Stefan are a nice pair," grumbled Bustellos.

"Is that a comment on the ethics and scruples of your own party?"

"Not at all. But Stefan told me once that picking sides because the cause appealed to you was a luxury only the rich could afford."

"In spite of his cynicism, he is a loyal fighter," said Calderon.

"Because he knows he wouldn't last twelve hours if he wasn't," retorted Bustellos. "And he isn't a fool. Far from it. That's why we use him."

"The police state always commands loyalty through fear of—liquidation is the word, isn't it?" remarked Weston.

"I don't think it is fear that makes Stefan loyal," Calderon put in quietly.

Radetch came in that moment and there was an end to the discussion. Bustellos said, "Come into the office and give Weston the directions for delivery."

In the office, Radetch took a sheet of paper and wrote down a position, explaining at the same time. "The pilot should follow the coast from San José south. Thirty-seven kilometers south is Cap San Felipe. Ten kilos south of that is a long sandy beach, so he can't miss it. A boat will come out to meet him. The best time is 2 P. M. When can you have the first plane there?"

"I'll have to communicate with my pilot."

"Cable?"

"Phone."

"Hell. That means going back to the capital."

"Why can't you cable?" demanded Bustellos irritably.

"Because my instructions were to wait for me to telephone personally." Weston smiled a bit unpleasantly. "I do have to take reasonable precautions."

"It's light enough at five," said Bustellos. "If you leave then, you'll be in by seven. If you make your call right away, could you get a plane down tomorrow?"

Weston was trying to decide how much information to give them to create a show of frankness.

"Who is your pilot?" asked Radetch.

"Fellow named Jeffries. Good pilot. So long as he gets paid he asks no questions and keeps his trap shut. He's in Tegucigalpa, waiting word from me."

"Won't take him more than an hour and a half to fly down from there."

"The planes are in Honduras but not in the Tegucigalpa airport," Weston told him. "Too many questions asked in big airports."

"It doesn't take more than a couple of hours to fly all round Honduras," remarked Radetch. "If you can call him before seven-thirty, he ought to be able to make it, if the plane is ready."

"There's weather, too"

"I'll give orders for the boat tomorrow at two," said Bustellos. "Stefan, you'll meet it, if the plane is coming. If it can't make it, send a radio to Tagalpa."

"If the weather's impossible, he can try the day after," suggested Weston.

"That's best. Though it is usually clear on the coast at that time of day."

"And someone will bring the money?"

"Don't worry. You'll get paid," said Bustellos.

"You won't get any more planes if I'm not."

"You people who are getting an early start will want to turn in, I expect." Bustellos stood up, tapping a pencil on the table. "Don Frederico, I want a word with Weston alone."

The old man started for the door, then turned and said, almost wistfully, "Perhaps we can finish our game before you go to bed."

"Sure. I'll be with you in a minute."

When they were alone, Bustellos closed the door. "I don't have to remind you, do I, that Stefan will stay with you all the time you are in the capital. All the time," he repeated. "Particularly while you are telephoning."

"I took that for granted."

"I understand that Don Frederico was a good friend of yours and that you owe him a good deal. I am sure you are a man who pays his debts."

"Hostage?"

"Nothing so crude. I am a good judge of men, Weston, and because I am, I do not threaten you. You know—you knew before you came—what happens to those who betray or oppose us. I don't think you can be frightened by threats." As he paused, Weston made him a mock bow. "But it is well that you should remember that, should we be betrayed, the one who would suffer most would be Don Frederico. For a long time the regime has been very anxious to get their hands on him. Any threat to this place is a threat to him."

"As I haven't the vaguest idea where 'this place' is, you haven't much to worry about," said Weston. "Good night."

"Pleasant trip, señor."

WESTON rejoined Calderon at the chess board. The old man was shaking his head over the position of the men. "You did not have your mind on the game, Paul," he said. "You could nearly always beat me when you put your mind to it."

"Let me see what can be done about remedying the situation." Weston sat down and studied the position of his pieces. His head was aching and he felt as tired as if he'd done thirty miles with a fifty-pound sack, but he forced his mind to the game. It would hurt the old man if he felt he'd been allowed to win. Three quarters of an hour later, Calderon sat back and smiled. "I resign," he said. Weston nodded. He had the game won, now. "That was better," the old man went on. "Now go and get some rest, Paul. *Vaya con Dios.*"

Weston made mental notes of the sentries as he walked towards his quarters. When he reached his cubicle, he found that someone had thoughtfully provided him with a candle. He sat on the cot and opened his bag, taking out towel and soap. Bath up the path at the back, Radetch had said.

The sentry outside looked at him with-

out particular interest and said, "Want to take a bath? There's no light."

"I've got a flashlight, thanks." Using it, Weston proceeded up the path. He found a sheet of corrugated iron balanced precariously on four bamboo poles and under its shelter a fifty gallon gasoline drum filled with water, a half coconut shell handy to dip the water out. The water was clean and cool and he felt more human when he had finished.

As he started down the path again a sharp hiss came from the bushes on his right. "Don Pablo!" It was Tomas.

Weston remained standing in the middle of the path, his eyes scanning the darkness left and right. "What is it, Tomas?"

"These men—Don Frederico believes that they are his friends."

"And you don't?" asked Weston softly.

"They do not believe what Don Frederico has always taught us," the man said simply. "But he says they will help us."

Weston hoped that Tomas could not see his face in the darkness. He said, "They are not the kind of men that Don Frederico used to call friend, but I expect he knows best, Tomas."

"He feels that now that you have come, Don Pablo, all will be well." Was there a hint of doubt in Tomas' voice? Was he saying, "*He* feels it but I do not?" Or was that Weston's own conscience. He realized Tomas waited for a reply.

"We will know soon, Tomas. Go now, for we must not be found talking."

When he regained his dormitory, the sentry was sitting on the edge of the veranda, his shoes off, his feet dangling, his back against a post and his rifle propped against one knee. The bamboo flooring in the next cubicle creaked as its occupant moved around preparatory to going to bed. Evidently the arrangements were of a sketchy nature for shortly the sounds ceased.

He lay down on the cot and deliberately relaxed his muscles. He tried to make his brain a blank but his usual iron self-discipline failed him tonight. Pictures followed each other through his mind. Calderon's face as he said, "*Vaya con Dios*"— Go with God. Tomas saying, "Now you've come all will be well." And always Gerard's harassed anxiety as he had said, "It must not happen." He smoked cigarette after cigarette to discourage the mosquitoes but they seemed to be a breed that thrived on the fumes of nicotine and came back for more. At intervals he looked at his watch. The hand moved round the luminous dial unbelievably slowly. Finally it was eleven.

He sat up on the cot and pulled on his coat. Not because the night had grown cooler but because it was darker than a white shirt. Cautiously, to avoid making the bamboo flooring squeak, he reached the window. Listening to his neighbor's snores he wondered if he need worry. Those snores would mask the approach of a squadron. He climbed through the window and dropped down. . .

(End of Part II)

A
FACT
STORY

By
Robert Monroe

(Star of "High Adventure," Mutual Broadcasting System)

HIGH ADVENTURE IN THE OLD WEST

WHEN we think of the Old West many of us get a mental picture of great activity in which the use of the Colt Single Action Army Revolver (sometimes called the Frontier Model) and the Winchester lever action repeating rifle play a predominant part.

In illustrations picturing situations of action as described in fiction or shown in movies depicting the winning of the west, we invariably see these tools which were an everyday necessity of those times and conditions. We have come to recognize them as representing "High Adventure" in the Old West!

Why have the single action Colt and the Winchester lever action received most of the publicity? There were other fine weapons being produced, sold, and used during that exciting period of our history!

The reasons are very interesting—in some instances more or less obscure, and in others quite obvious.

During the Civil War the Colt cap and ball-revolver was no doubt the best known for the simple reason that there were more of them in use, they were good reliable handguns, but above all Samuel Colt was a good promoter and publicity man.

The Remington and the Rodgers and Spencer, both six shot cap and ball revolvers, were perhaps the best of the handguns produced during the Civil War. Yet these two weapons are practically unknown, except to students of firearms and gun collectors. The Rodgers and Spencer, although my favorite, was one of the least known even during the cap and ball period. Around five thousand were manufactured toward the end of the Civil War, and they saw little or no war-time service. This accounts for the fact that most specimens we see today are in fine or almost new condition.

At the end of the war many discharged soldiers, both Union and Confederate, migrated westward, taking their army weapons with them when possible. And many of these cap and ball guns were in use for years after the advent of the self-exploding cartridge.

The first Colt revolver, chambered for the centerfire cartridge, that was produced in any great quantity was the New Model Army Metallic Cartridge Revolving Pistol. It was none other than our hero the Single Action Army Revolver. Work on this model was begun in 1871, and in .45 caliber it was placed in the hands of the Ordnance Department for

(Continued on page 124)

OF LORDS AND LUNATICS

A Caradosso Story

By F. R. BUCKLEY

Scarcely had I regained my ditch when the castle wall burst into a sheet of flame.

ILLUSTRATED BY L. STERNE STEVENS

TO His Exalted Highness, my Lord Pietro IV, Duke of Rometia; from Luigi Caradosso, sometime Captain of the Guard, these:

Sire:

In the matter of the hanging of the monk:

I recommend this without unkindness (knowing indeed nothing of the man beyond his seditious utterances)—solely in my quality of retired soldier (to whom Your Grace hath sometimes turned for advice)—now aged eighty-one and with sixty years' experience in dealing with enemies of the duchy. And while suggesting that the reverend gentleman be stretched, of course I expected Your Grace to correct my conclusions with the wisdom of your own thirty years of existence (which God extend) and four upon the throne.

So that if Your Highness, with so much to lose by the overthrow of the duchy,

wisheth to ignore this Ugo's incitements to that end, obviously 'tis improper that I should protest further, with naught at stake beyond this leaky cottage and a pension insufficient to keep me in wine.

Only because Your Eminence commands me to explain what Your Serenity is pleased to call my "murderous counsels" do I again take pen in hand; premising (lest Your Grace should have forgotten) that I was raised in a convent, and there learned that the habit doth not always make the monk.

In reminding Your Lordship of the which, I remind myself of a strange sentence in Your Excellency's letter; desiring me (if I have read it aright) to reply "if possible without a story of which I am myself the hero."

Sire, another man might take yon request as a veiled accusation of boastfulness; but, conscious of my own modesty—and in view of my past achievements, I regard myself presently as the most modest man in Italy—I prefer to view it as evidence that Your Grace hath added prophecy to his other gifts.

For—as will be seen—in the instance I now have the honor to submit to Your Highness' sagacity, I do not figure at all, save as Captain of the Guard to Your Grace's grandfather, whom God receive.

HIS lordship was then busy building up his domains from the small county of Rometia into the duchy over which Your Eminence now hath the felicity to rule; and was displaying in the process that mixture of boldness and cowardice, cunning and stupidity, godliness and criminality, without which no leader may succeed. In a long life, I have observed that princes who are all good or all bad have, as it were, all their eggs in one basket, which they invariably drop; whereas these gallimaufry-men (if I may be permitted to speak of nobles in terms of stew) are so disposed that they succeed as often by their virtues and stupidities, as they do by their cleverness and sins; and so do well in season and out; in this world anyway.

For instance, Pietro II, at the time whereof I write, was with the utmost calmness watching his northern neighbor build a fortress in the said neighbor's capital town. We had long coveted this neighbor's lands; this capital town, Porli, was on the border we should have to cross to take them; this fortress the Count was building was an ugly lump of a thing which dominated not only the city but also the one highway fit for guns; and yet my master sat complacent in his tower-room, maintaining to my beard that the fortress-builder was doing us a favor!

"Look you, Luigi," says His Grace; chewing the feather off a pen, to be sure, but playfully and with a smile on his face. "Y'are but a soldier, mad to rush forth and knock folk on the head. But I assure—"

"I have got more men than I've gutted, sir," I told him with some indignation; at which he did me the honor to smile.

"But," says he, his eyes warning me not to interrupt him again," I assure thee, statecraft hath other branches, Captain. For instance it is to be considered that Porli hath of late been a hotbed of pernicious politics."

He meant that the merchants and the guilds of artisans had petitioned for some share in the government; their Count being a rude man with a taste for their womenfolk and no moderation in the matter of taxes. As master of our spies, I was of course well aware of this movement in the Porli populace; indeed, it was from my reports Pietro had the knowledge he now was throwing in my teeth. But I said nothing. Ah, if the things I have not said to nobles (including Your Grace) were written in a book, what a book that would be! What a library!

But no matter.

"I'd thought Your Highness was to take these bad folk over," says I, "and teach them better ways."

"There y'are again," says my lord. "From slaughter in the field thy mind leaps to hangings. Th'art a bloody ruffian, Caradosso; but I am a merciful prince. Famed for it."

I think I have told Your Grace in previous dispatches that this room of Your Lordship's grandfather, in which we were talking, was built above the torture-

chamber, with a shaft rising from this latter through the thickness of the wall. By opening the door of a sort of little cupboard, His Grace could at will listen (or cause other persons to listen) to the shrieks of subjects being mercifully dealt with below. The doors were now closed, but Pietro saw my glance at them and grinned as he spat out some pen-feathers. Long since he had explained to me that there are two means by which a prince may be famed for clemency (the fame being all he cared for); first, by exercising mercy for many years, with consequent danger to his life and estates; or otherwise, by torturing any daring to impugn his clemency. Strange (methought) that a man clever enough to choose the better method of these twain, should be too stupid to see the peril of this Porli fortress.

"Now, my neighbor over the frontier," says Pietro, wagging his head, "hath a sad name for cruelty; which the building of this castle to overawe the town—and with dungeons in it, too, I warrant me—will greatly increase. I hear there are to be cells without windows, in which a rebel may neither stand up nor lie down; and that on the townward wall there shall hang iron cages, in which malcontents may publicly starve to death."

This to me, from whom alone he knew of such projects!

"Sire—" I broke forth.

"Sad cruelty, sad cruelty," says he, wagging his head again, "but calculated—at no cost to me—both to discourage foolish thoughts, *Luigi mio,* by removing the thinkers; and to predispose the remaining population in favor of a kindly man like myself. So that when I annex the county—"

"But, sire—" I said again.

"This is twice," says his lordship thinly; alluding to my interruptions. "I might lose my patience a third time, Captain. So speak. Briefly."

"Will not Your Grace graciously consider," says I, "that this fortress, now a-building to tame the Porli people, is likewise designed to prevent Your Highness from taking over the county when it shall be well-behaved? As I have told Your Grace, there are to be more guns commanding the highway, and bigger ones too, than on the townward side. Moreover, 'tis toward *us* that there will point a filthy great sally-port fit to spew cavalry—"

"And the garrison of this fort, now," asks my lord. "While it is pouring out toward us—should chance ever take us, I mean, in that direction—will it also be manning the battlements on the town side?"

I STARED at him horrified. With all due respect, I saw his idiot plan.

"Would the said garrison, while dealing with us," he enlarged, looking sly like a schoolboy that hath stolen a sausage, "have time also to fight off the enraged citizens; who will have seen their fathers and suchlike hanged in those iron cages, and who will be out with their weapons and their scaling ladders to avenge them? Eh, Captain Caradosso?"

It was beyond reason, let alone speech.

Citizens—half of whose blood is notoriously borrowed from rabbits—armed with meat-choppers and their wives' bodkins; mounted on the ladders they used to clean windows withal, and storming walls already twenty feet high and soon to be thirty or more! I imagined my poor devils in the field, under cannon-fire from the walls, cavalry debouching from the sally-port and as like as not Swiss mercenaries taking us on the flank—and we waiting for the townsfolk to take the pressure off us.

I tried to put the case calmly to his lordship; but I warmed to my subject and it is possible that toward the last I addressed him with more emphasis than was meet. What I said exactly, I do not remember; recovering, as it were, consciousness to find myself holding out to His Grace two handfuls of hair torn from my own head after I had thrown (he averred) my helmet to the floor and kicked it.

Pietro was at that moment standing behind his table, his robe wrapped closely around him, and his whole demeanor demonstrating displeasure. I particularly remember his eyes. That was the only time I have ever seen icicles on fire.

"Thou drunken, lecherous murdering, blasphemous brute beast," says my lord.

I was *not* drunk.

"Sire—" I said.

"Wag thy lousy locks at me, would thee?" says my lord, using soldier slang with a noble's accent; a combination which make my knee-bones knock together. "Throw thy stinking helmet on the floor, would thee, pleading for thy foul hide? Fear Porli more than *me,* thou boar, dost tha?"

Had he said "hog" instead of "boar" I should have despaired; but a man does not pay compliments when he is to hang one out of hand. I therefore picked up my helmet, put the handfuls of hair into it, put it on, saluted and hoped for the best.

"Ah," said His Grace, and appeared to consider.

He considered (if my feelings were anything to go by) for about a thousand years.

Then:

"I am a merciful prince," says he, almost as if he were talking to himself, "wherefore I will not take thy life. I will leave thee instead to die in the gutter. Thou'lt leave Rometia within the hour."

I saluted, my heart cold within me. I knew what he meant.

"Thee can have thy dagger," he continued; that was to say I must leave my sword, armor and horse; which were of course his, but which it was customary to present to officers unless they were dismissed in disgrace. But then, so deep *was* I in disgrace that I was grateful even for the dagger. And my clothes, of which he had made no mention. I have known captains kicked forth mother-naked, and in winter, too.

"I doubt me thou'lt get another place at court," says Pietro, well knowing that no noble would employ me without a written discharge from him. "Princes sometimes have occasion to fight battles, *signore,* and for that thou'rt a trifle lily-livered, it seems to me. But with thy dagger and that great beard doubtless thee can rob old women of pennies in the by-way. And so begone."

Ah, sire, to be called *signore* like a civilian, only because I had proved myself an honest soldier!

There were tears in my eyes as I trudged back to my quarters. Not because of the fear of starvation either. I do not, indeed, exactly know the cause of them.

I was young, of course.

Possibly I had heretofore believed in justice.

AND I now perceive that with the best will in the world, I have been disobeying Your Grace by bringing myself into this discourse, which by Your Lordship's command is to be about the hangability of friars. I may be the more easily pardoned for the foregoing use of "I" if Your Eminence will reflect that I am not a romancer, capable of disguising myself as Julius Caesar or Aamdis de Gaul; and, further, that I am to me more interesting than whole gallowsful of monks.

However, and for the next twelve months, I disappear entirely from this narrative; to live as best I could under Your Ancestor's displeasure, which was a heavy weight. Lacking money, in the beginning, wherewith to travel far from Rometia; and having been (as all guard captains must be in those days) master of my late lord's spies, I was not without knowledge of events following my departure.

Foremost among them was a great increase in the speed of building that fortress at Porli.

Its walls, at the time of my dismissal, were already some twenty feet high; which state of affairs, considering that the towers were not yet built, should have left the citadel vulnerable—or reasonably so—for another year.

But, having got rid of his only knowledgeable adviser (Your Grace will note my avoidance of the word "me") my lord Pietro overpassed my lieutenant and brought in as captain a Sicilian ruffian whone name I forget. This was a ruffling fellow, who thought to discount the fortress by holding cavalry exercises up to the very frontier. Whereat, naturally, my lord of Porli took alarm; doubled his relays of masons and engineers and began to build the towers long before he would have done so in the ordinary course.

So pressed was he, indeed, that he abandoned altogether the building of

one tower, whose foundations had been laid already in the middle of the wall facing Rometia, and ordered the masons to seal up the vaults and build the wall across them; a saving of six clear months. Moreover, sharing my contempt for the people of Porli, this Sicilian captain of Pietro's did not see as I (pardon) had seen, the necessity of keeping them stirred up and ill at ease; so that the local populace sat on its hunkers and watched the walls rising day after day to oppress them, without even flinging vegetables at the workmen.

Sole protestant—and now we are coming to the matter commanded by Your Grace—was a lunatic monk who said salvation was to be gained by daubing oneself with ashes. He said also that he had escaped from the prisons of the Inquisition, whither he'd been sent for championing poor folk; but, daubed all over with ashes as he was, he looked rather as though he had risen from the dead.

He flitted among the masons crying *"Nisi Dominus aedificaverit domum"* (which, being convent-raised myself, I can tell Your Grace means, "Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it") and for some time the workmen, especially around the tower-foundation which he used as a pulpit, were woundy afraid of him.

That they recovered their wits before their work had been much delayed, and chased him away to scream psalms at them from the hillside, was due partly to my lord of Porli's scornful failure to arrest him, but mostly to the workmen's finding that the monk ate more than they did. I do not know why holiness should not need nutrition—it hath always seemed to me exceedingly hard work—but that it does not is one of the strongest beliefs of the vulgar mind. This friar at Porli, in addition to emptying in the course of the day a great sack which he brought with him each morning, was continually begging bits of food from the workmen; so that as I have said they despised him.

Had he lived on crusts and water, he might have seduced those Porli workmen as this latter-day rogue (whom I respectfully advised Your Excellency to hang) hath led astray Your Grace's subjects in Rometia.

As it was, they (I mean the Porli workmen) worked on; and after a week the ash-man (as they had come to call him) departed and was no more seen. And after some months, the citadel was finished to the point at which it was a cursed nasty obstacle to invasion; some weeks after which, of course, Your Grace's grandfather became prey of a desire to take time by the forelock and invade.

The Sicilian captain was, so to put it, other-minded.

The project being opened to him, indeed, that rogue not only showed no stomach for it, but before deserting gave warning (for money) to my lord of Porli—who of course not only garrisoned the fort to its crenellations, but started negotiations (of which Your Grace's grandfather got wind) to hire Swiss for the invasion of Rometia. At this juncture, command was offered to my former lieutenant, who accepted and deserted in his turn; and so it came about that I, peacefully exercising the profession of fencing-master in Venice, suddenly found myself confronted by hired bravos (probably left-overs from the Sicilian captaincy—I knew them not) who by my Lord Pietro's orders proposed to escort me willy-nilly to Rometia. I beg Your Lordship's pardon for again bringing myself back into the story; but the friar has not lasted as long as I thought he would, albeit more is to be heard of him later; and meseems Your Eminence will wish to know how, after all, Porli became part of your duchy.)

I DID not accompany the ruffians back to Rometia; instead, having seen them decently buried, I took their horses and armor and returned of my own free will, and in style suitable to a captain whom time and events have proved right. On the way, I had the good fortune to find, in course of a tavern brawl, a young fellow who seemed to have the makings of a lieutenant; so I spared his life and sent him ahead of me; and sure enough, when I arrived there was the guard turned out as neat and respectful, almost, as they had been the year before. Having broken the nose of

the one rascal who had a spot on his breastplate, I sought audience of his lordship more confidently than I had entered his presence twelve months since —aha he might lounge in his chair while I stood to attention, he might flicker his wicked eye at me, God rest it, and chew pens till he choked; but he needed me more than I needed him at the moment; a brief moment, to be sure, but thank God I profited by it.

For instance:

"Thou'rt back, then, Luigi," says His Grace.

And:

"Ah, sire," says I, saluting, "well Your Highness knows that in my heart I have never been away. For all Your Lordship's hastiness at my last audience, I have considered myself still in the service of Your Eminence, and merely to be on leave of absence. With pay."

He considered me for some time with those diabolical eyes, and nodded.

"But without duties, eh?"

"With information, my Lord. Your Highness' agents, most of whom I had near—"

"What's the garrison of that hut at Porli?"

"With due respect, sire, it is no hut. The walls are eight ells high, four ells thick and crenellated; there are eighteen guns on our side and twelve toward the town; but there they have a ditch and the streets are chained. The walls also mount swivels to the number of twenty-six, and the courtines facing Rometia are machicolated for the dropping of molten lead. Most of the lead to be melted and dropped hath been torn off the roof of Your Highness' house in Porli, situate at the corner of the Via Reale and the Vico Tornabuoni. There were seven hundred men in the fort last week—I have not heard since—but there are eleven hundred Swiss at Casatico, ready to march if my lord of Porli will raise his bid for their services by four hundred Florentine crowns; and when his lordship hears that I have rejoined Your Excellency's service, doubtless—"

"Enough!" snaps Pietro, before I could pay myself a well-earned compliment. "We've eight hundred men—"

"Counting the country levies," I reminded him. "And only ten guns, my lord, none of them siege-pieces; and—"

His nerves must have been at stretch for some time, poor gentleman; because now he bolted out of his chair, overturning it; and he banged on the table with his fist and his eyes glared and ah, ah, ah! this time it was he who turned pale. I could have wished, with all due respect, that he might have sweated and that his hair might have stood on end as mine had done; but it was not to be.

His voice was, however, gratifyingly hoarse.

"In one word, Caradosso," says he, "canst take that cursed castle, or must we die fighting those lousy Swiss?"

"There is no captain in Italy, sire," I told him, "who could reduce that fortress in the necessary week."

Truly I believe that in another moment he would have begun to sweat; but I am kindly by nature, and then again I had no time to waste on amusements.

"Except myself," I therefore added; and saluted and went about my business. Before I left (now I bethink me) there was some talk about my wearing four-bands of fur on my sleeve thenceforward, instead of the three I'd been permitted theretofore; and of a contract whereby in the future I might not be dismissed without concurrence of the Council of Captains; but his lordship was most gracious in these matters, and they did not delay me long.

Ha! Meseems at this point that unless Your Grace hath quite overcome the ignoble vice of curiosity, I could induce a slight perspiration even in Your Excellency by pretending to remember that I must not speak of myself, but only of friars past and present; and leaving Your Serenity to imagine how four hundred trained men, backed only by a rabble of levies, managed to take a well-armed fortress *not* in the week that was left us before the arrival of the Swiss; but in three days—whereof two were consumed in getting our force into marching order and disposing them in face of the citadel.

The dispositions, which I made under cover of the night of our arrival, were peculiar; to the extent that my lieutenant, who assisted in them, visibly con-

sidered me mad. He did not say so, being a youth with healthy respects for discipline and the integrity of his face-bones; but when all was in order he permitted himself to ask if this were some modern invention. He and I were, at that moment, lying in a ditch, some hundred paces from the night-veiled castle walls; just about opposite, I reckoned, the foundations of that tower about which my lord of Porli had changed his mind, and from which (as Your Highness will remember) that friar had used to preach. Behind us, in the darkness, extended the crouching masses of our troops, as silent as eight hundred men can be knowing guns above are ready to open fire on them. I had, of course, left our campfires blazing at some distance, and enough men to move about among them, that the enemy think us in bivouac.

"Is what a modern invention?" I asked.

"W-why," says the lieutenant, his teeth chattering for some reason, "the pr-preparation of storming columns, Captain, b-before the walls have been bub-bub-bub-bub-breached."

"Ah!" says I; and with no more explanation moved forward, alone and crawling, toward the wall.

I RETURNED a good deal more hastily than I had set out; now shouting and waving my sword, moreover, in such fashion as caused those rogues on the wall to shoot promiscuously in my direction and confirmed by lieutenant in his belief that I was mad.

However, I was not concerned with him or with the hand-gun men, but only with my storming-column, that it should be ready and alert even so long—ha ha!—before the breaching of the wall.

And how long was it before those walls were breached?

Your Grace, with the impetuousness of youth, might guess three weeks; had he more knowledge of siegecraft (or of that fortress, which was pulled down in 1556) he might more reasonably say three months. It was about three minutes.

For scarcely had I regained my ditch than there was a rumbling that swelled into a thunderous roar; and the night sky over the castle wall split with a sheet of flame; and as the flame soared (carrying on its crest all sort of stones, beams, guns and pieces of men)—it was visible that it left behind a great gap in the enceinte; a breach ten ells wide; through which my little army could (and did) rush without let or hindrance—to overcome the garrison.

Now Your Grace will think that I have again forgotten the injunction to write about friars. Not so.

Because I must now inform Your Lordship that 'twas yon lunatic friar, daubed with ashes and rejected by my lord of Porli's guard, who really took that fort. Not content with prophesying the doom of the citadel, sitha, he had taken wordly measures to ensure it. The great sack he had brought to the works every morning had contained, not food, but gunpowder, which he had emptied into the foundation-vaults of that tower before the masons sealed them and built the wall across. Departing amid derision, he had left a fuze to the said powder, its outward end concealed (and protected) in a crack of the masonry.

Having knowledge of the which, I had but to light it and lead my storming party in over the ruins.

So that Your Grace may see, as my lord of Porli (lacking my advice) could not, what dangers may reside in religious persons, even when they are mad and daubed out of God's likeness with ashes; much more when they are clean and in their right minds, like this Fra Ugo whom I again respectfully beg Your Eminence to hang.

And if Your Grace should again object his cloth, I would again respectfully ask, who knows that he really is a friar? Those monks (peace to their ashes) who raised me from a foundling in their so-called monastery, were in reality no monks at all, but counterfeits and impostors.

Nor was that friar at Porli an impostor.

Having been, in fact (if I may for the last time bring myself into this history)

None other than

Your Grace's humble
And obliged loving servant
L. Caradosso
Captain.

Chubby yelped and lit out of there with Woola-Woola close on his heels.

A PIECE OF

By

DOUGLAS LEACH

AN EVEN break, Mac; that's all I've ever wanted. But have I ever got it? Not on your life! Why, if I'd had as much as a smell of normal luck I wouldn't be standing here right now without enough dough to buy you a drink. No, nor without enough to buy myself one if it comes to that.

Well, if you insist, Mac. Mine's a rye. Now take, for instance, that time in

ILLUSTRATED BY JOSEPH A. FARREN

WOOLA-WOOLA

Queensland when I owned a part of Woola-Woola, the Australian blackfellow. That looked like a cinch. A cold, cast-iron certainty. Right up to the last it was a winner, and then—bingo!

It was when Joe Quigley and me were on the tramp through the sheep country round Barcaldine, in the good old days when being a swaggie—that's a hobo—was a recognized profession, and when, if you timed it right, you could always make sure of a good feed and a flop by turning up at the homestead of a sheep station at sundown.

No fooling, that was the Golden Age in Australia, when the station-owners were full of hospitality and the brotherhood of man, and dead scared to give you the bum's rush in case you dropped a match in the grass and burnt out hun-

dreds of acres of very valuable pasture.

What a fine, free, healthy life that was! After the dust and turmoil of the big cities, with their narrow outlook on life and their cops at every corner, it was a wonderful relief to head for the Great Outback, where no one knew you. The only trouble was there was no money in it.

IT was one night when we were camped in the bed of a dry creek that we first met Woola-Woola. It all comes back to me like it only happened last Tuesday—the fire of gum logs, and the smell of smoke and burning eucalyptus leaves; the only sounds the night wind in the gum-trees and the clicking of Joe's new set of teeth that didn't fit him any too well, as he dug into his panful of mutton hash. I remember I heard something move, and I looked up, and there was a tall blackfellow standing just inside the ring of the firelight.

I guess I must have jumped a bit, for Joe glanced round too. The blackfellow was licking his lips and making a noise that sounded like "woola-woola." He was naked except for a loin-cloth and a bowler hat—the kind the Aussies used to call a hard-hitter. He had a mop of frizzy hair under the hat, and high cheek-bones, and long, lean legs corded with muscle. A tough-looking baby.

"Hello!" said Joe. "Who are you?"

But the black only grinned and made that woola-woola noise again.

"The poor guy's hungry," I said; and I threw him a piece of meat.

He caught it in one big hand and gulped it down like a starving dingo. Then Joe threw him a chunk, and he swallowed that too. Well, we had plenty of meat, and we were figuring on reaching the Toolgai station next day, where we could get fresh rations, so we fed that black till he was all blown up like a poisoned pup. When he'd had enough he squatted down on his heels, and sighed, and said, "You plenty good fella!"

It was the first time he'd spoken, and we began to question him. He knew a few words of pidgin English, but all we could get out of him was that he'd come from somewhere right near the coast.

"One of them Cape York boys, I reckon," remarked Joe. "He ain't no ordinary Myall; he's too big. He probably fell into the hands of the missionaries at some time or other, and that's where he picked up 'is little bit of lingo."

After a while the blackfellow scrooched around on the ground like a dog making up its mind where to sleep, and inside of a minute he was snoring his head off.

From that moment that black savage attached himself to us. Ever been followed by a strange pooch, and chased him away, and had him turn up again hours later when you thought you'd got rid of him? It was like that with this guy, and it got so that in the end we didn't even try to chase him off. So then he would trail along about fifty yards behind us, always keeping that distance till we built a fire and cooked a meal. Then he'd come right up close and make that woola-woola sound till we fed him. That's why we called him Woola-Woola.

He was handy, mind. He was as strong as an ox, and he could pick up a back-log for the fire that me and Joe couldn't have lifted between us, and carry it as if it was only a stick. And he never got lost, and always knew where the nearest creek or waterhole was.

In the next few weeks we wandered right down across the Barcoo and over the ranges towards the Buckland Tableland. And that was where the going got really tough! The stations were few and far between, and owing to a drought all the sheep were being fed round the home yards, so there was no chance of knocking off a stray. Then one evening we arrived at the homestead of the big Patterson Station, and as soon as Joe saw the fine big buildings and the sheep blatting in the paddock he let out a sigh of relief.

"This 'll do us, Yank!" he muttered—and I saw the little guy's eyes gleam.

We could see the boss sitting out on the verandah, and when the station dogs came rushing out at us, barking, he called 'em off, which was always a good sign.

"You put the fangs into 'im, Yank!" Joe whispered.

I cleared my throat and was just go-

ing to launch into my usual hardluck story when a guy in police uniform stepped out on to the verandah, very stylish in his polished leggings and his big hat turned up on one side.

"Holy smoke, a john!" groaned Joe.

Now I don't mind admitting that the unexpected appearance of this cop gave me a very stiff jolt indeed. But it was nothing to what it did to Woola-Woola! That black baby took one pop-eyed look, then let out a yell, turned like a flash, and headed for the bush.

Run? Say, I never knew human beings could run like it. He streaked across the paddock at a lick that would have made Jesse Owens look like a cripple with creeping paralysis. Whizz-zz! Just like that. And he was gone!

THE cop came down the verandah steps—a big, raw-boned Aussie with a lantern jaw and a cold, mean eye. Australian country "johns" never did have any time for swaggies, and they'd sling you into the can on a vag charge as soon as look as you. This one stuck out his chin at Joe.

"Who was that abo?" he wanted to know.

"He's a stray we picked up," explained Joe. "He follers us about, and we can't get rid of 'im."

You could see the cop didn't believe him. He was sure we were up to no good, but he couldn't prove anything.

"What are you two deadbeats doing around here, anyway?" he snapped.

"We're looking for a job," I told him. Well, what else could I say?

"A job! Why, you're just the blokes I'm looking for!" exclaimed the boss, getting up and looking us over as though we were a couple of horses he was thinking of buying. "I'm short-handed, and I've got two thousand fence posts I want split. I'll pay you union rates, and as the men won't be having supper for a couple of hours you might as well wire in while you're waiting."

And I'm darned if he didn't lead us over, there and then, to a great pile of ironbark logs which had been cut into seven-foot lengths. He found two axes and a maul and some iron wedges, and we set to work.

You see, we had to, because that constable strolled over and sat on a log and watched us. We knew that he was only waiting for an excuse to vag us, so we had to pretend to be genuine, honest toilers.

Joe and me had sunk pretty low in our time, but we'd never sunk as low as this before. It was a most humiliating experience, and one that we didn't forget in a hurry. Long before the supper-bell went I had blisters on my hands as big as grapes, and I knew my fingers were ruined and that I'd never be able to deal myself out a good poker hand again.

We did get a good supper out of it, though. They feed well on Queensland stations, and no camels starting out to cross the desert ever stoked up more than Joe and me did that night. I ate till my eyes bulged out, but all the time I was embittered by the thought of that cop. It was a hundred to one chance, his happening to be visiting the station just when we called. But that's just it, Mac—that's the sort of lousy deal fate has handed me all my life!

They gave us a couple of bunks in the roustabouts' quarters that night, but we hardly used 'em. We slept for maybe an hour and a half, then we got up, rolled our swags, and stole out of there. We didn't know where we were going, and we didn't care as long as we didn't have any more fence-posts to split.

On the way out we passed through a small irrigated orange grove that was back of the vegetable garden, and we filled a couple of gunny-sacks with oranges. When we were a safe distance from the homestead we flopped under a tree for the night, and when we woke in the morning there was Woola-Woola, squatting on his heels and grinning that friendly grin of his. How he'd found us we never knew, but he was like that. He'd always turn up.

"Plenty good fella!" he rumbled. "Plenty good fella marster! Woola-woola-woola-woola."

"Poor cove," said Joe, tossing him an orange. "'E must be 'ungrier than we are."

Woola-Woola ate the oranges we gave him, but you could see he was very disappointed that there wasn't any meat.

As Woola-Woola munched those oranges, skin and pips and all, Joe stared at him thoughtfully. After a while he said, "Yer know, I reckon he must be about the fastest thing on two legs, dinkum! Did yer see 'im travel when he spotted the john? Why, I've ridden race-'orses that weren't as fast as 'im!"

Now Joe Quigley was an ex-jockey, and when you get a guy like him, that's been warned off practically every course in Australia, you've got someone who knows something about pace. So naturally I began to look at Woola-Woola with a bit more interest, and gradually I got the glimmerings of an idea. If he was as fast as all that there was money in him. But there was something about him that puzzled me, so I said to him, "Why you fright along police-man?"

Woola-Woola hugged his ribs and nodded that kinky head of his.

"Me plenty fright, my word," he muttered. "Me—" and he tapped his chest —"me cannibal!"

Joe gave a grunt like someone had hit him, and I must say I felt rather queer myself. Joe looked at me and I looked at him, and we both looked at Woola-Woola.

Now and then you'd read about cases of cannibalism among the coastal blacks, and when such crimes occurred the Queensland police would try and hunt down the offender and maybe get him strung up just to take the appetite away from the others; so we could see why the sight of that uniform had scared the hell out of Woola-Woola.

"Better give 'im some more of them oranges," said Joe, shivering a little.

I looked at Joe, and he was a wizened-up little guy with bowlegs and a head that was too big for his body, and I laughed. "It's all right, Joe," I said, "He won't be tempted by a stringy little runt like you. Besides, they say they don't really like white meat."

"No?" muttered Joe. "Then where did he get that bowler 'at from?"

It certainly was a queer feeling, hob-nobbing with a cannibal, but I soon got used to the idea, and so did Joe, though it took him a bit longer.

"You got that stop-watch?" I asked Joe, when we stopped for a rest at noon in an empty boundary-rider's hut we saw.

"Too right!" said Joe, lugging it out and gazing at it fondly.

You see, after he'd lost his jockey's license Joe had managed to keep body and soul together for a time by touting and spying around racing stables, and selling the information to the big betting men. Many a nice hunk of dough that watch had earned him, and he'd grown quite attached to it.

"How about clocking Woola-Woola?" I said. "We ought to find out how good he really is."

It was quite simple. We paced out a hundred yards on a level stretch—a generous hundred, so as to be on the right side—and marked it out with stakes. Then we got it into Woola-Woola's black skull what we wanted him to do.

"You run like you plenty fright," I told him. "You run all same you see policeman!"

Joe went to the finishing post with his stop-watch, and I started Woola-Woola off by dropping my hat. After one or two false starts Woola-Woola cottoned on to the idea, and he shot down that stretch like a scared brumby. He shot by the post flat out, and Joe sang out: "Seven seconds dead!"

"Nuts!" I said. "Why, the world record is well over nine!"

"I don't care what the ruddy record is, he did it in seven dead!" snapped Joe. "And what's more, Yank, he ain't 'ad no experience. He was running green. If we train him I bet we can get 'im down to six-five. You want to forget all these record-breakers. This bloke is supernatural!"

JOE was very excited, and so was I. Woola-Woola hadn't stopped after passing the post, but had gone on clean out of sight, and when he trotted back a few minutes later he wasn't even out of breath.

"Joe, we've got to handle this thing carefully," I said. "It's no use owning the fastest runner in the world if we can't cash in on him. I've been thinking it over; what we must do is take him back to Brisbane and match him against one of Chubby Sheldon's star trackmen. For big stakes!"

"That's an idea," Joe admitted to me.

Now this Chubby Sheldon was a wealthy Brisbane sport who kept a stable of assorted athletes. Fighters, wrestlers, runners, weight-lifters—he had 'em all. It was a sort of hobby with him, and as he had plenty of dough he would bet his shirt on any one of them. Yes, he was the greatest guy for a bet I ever knew, and the more I thought about it the more I could see my way to a life of affluence and ease. I remembered that he had a sprinter he thought the world of. The Sydney Streak, they called him. He was a leggy young redhead who'd done in even time while he was still a school-kid, and he'd improved a lot since then.

"But no matter how fast he is, Woola-Woola will beat him without half trying," I pointed out. "Now suppose we offer to give the Sydney Streak a start. Chubby will be so sure of winning he'll lay his whole roll on the line, and we'll clean up, Joe! Clean up big!"

"What are we going to use as a starting stake?" Joe wanted to know. "Chubby ain't the sort to make big bets with blokes that are broke. 'E'll want to see the color of our money."

That was an angle I hadn't thought of.

"What about that rich brother of yours?" I suggested. "The one that's got the butcher's shop in South Brisbane? Wouldn't he be good for eight or nine hundred if you showed him how attractive the prospects are?"

"You mean Charlie?" said Joe. "Hell, I ain't never got nothing out of Charlie but lots of 'ard work! He's always short of 'elp, and whenever I go to see 'im he shoves a meat cleaver in my 'and, or wants me to shift a few sides of beef. Not for little Joe!" He shook his head sadly and added: "Besides, he's a pious cove, and don't 'old with no such sinful pastimes as betting."

"Then there's only one way out," I said. "We shall have to cut Al Mossman in on the deal."

"That crook!" Joe snorted.

"Well, I know Mossman isn't a very desirable character," I said, "but he's got money. We could let him have a part of Woola-Woola in return for putting up the dough."

We talked it over for a long time, and Joe agreed that it was the best plan in the circumstances.

"This is the greatest thing that's ever happened to us, Joe," I said. "I guess my luck must have changed at last."

And it certainly looked as though I was right, for that was the afternoon we came across the old ewe. Owing to the drought she was as thin as a rail and practically on her last legs, so we took pity on her and put her out of her misery. And that night we ate her.

When we cooked her we could hardly keep Woola-Woola away from the fire. He was slavering at the mouth, and sniffing over the kerosene tin we stewed her in, and going woola-woola-woola for all he was worth. She was mighty tough and stringy, but we were so hungry she tasted like chicken. We gave Woola-Woola the head and the feet and all the delicacies we couldn't eat ourselves, and he had one swell gorge. Long after he was asleep Joe and me discussed the golden future. We decided to head due east, reach the North Coast Line somewhere near Flinders, and follow it south to Brisbane.

"But remember, we gotter keep Woola-Woola in strict training," said Joe.

And that was where we had a nasty shock, for when we tried the blackfellow out next day he turned in a most disappointing performance. He seemed to have lost all his pep.

"Why, blast 'is black soul, he didn't break even time!" cried Joe in disgust. "Try 'im again!"

So we tried him again. But it wasn't any use. He took eleven seconds over the second hundred, and finished up blowing like a broken-winded dray-horse.

"It was that meat," Joe declared. "He over-et!"

And sure enough, that's what it was! We found out by experimenting over the next ten days that to get any speed out of Woola-Woola we had to keep him off the meat.

"All right, then," swore Joe, "if that's the lay, we'll turn 'im into a ruddy vegetarian!"

Well, it was easier to do that when we got nearer to the coast, where the small fruit farms were. They hadn't had any

drought there, and it was just a case of waiting till dark and crawling through a wire fence and helping yourself to anything you fancied. So for days and days we fed Woola-Woola on bananas and peanuts and sweet potatoes and pineapples and green truck of all sorts, helped out with bread and butter that we'd buy from the townships on the route.

He didn't like it. No, sir, he didn't like it a bit, and it wasn't any use telling him that it was good for him, for how can you explain about calories and vitamins to a poor heathen that doesn't know more than a dozen words of English all told? Once or twice I thought he'd run away, but it seemed he was so attached to us that nothing would drive him off, and his doglike devotion was a very beautiful thing indeed. The only drawback was that Joe and me had to become vegetarians too, for it wouldn't have done for us to have been scoffing chops and steaks while Woola-Woola was munching his bread-and-butter and lettuce. And Joe and me liked our meat.

Still, it was all for a good cause, and by the time we got to the outskirts of Brisbane Woola-Woola was as hard as nails, and so fast that we didn't bother to clock him any more.

"The first thing we'll have to do is get him some clothes," I told Joe, as we made camp on the slope of a tree-covered hill that overlooked the suburbs. "We can't introduce him to all the amenities of civilization without at least getting pants on him."

We didn't have much working capital. The nice bit of money Joe had made when he'd ridden the red-hot favorite, Jackeroo, in the Randwick Handicap and come in last but one, had gone long ago, and all I had was about twenty-five shillings. However, I went into town and got a cheap pair of pants for fifteen shillings and a cotton shirt for five, and we dressed Woola-Woola up in 'em and took him to the house in Toowong where Mossman lived.

WE had quite a time getting Woola-Woola to Toowong. He'd never been in a city before, and he was awful scary and wild-eyed. I remember once, when a Coorparoo street-car came clanging round the corner, he howled with fright and flung himself face downwards on the sidewalk. We kicked him in the ribs and coaxed him to his feet before much of a crowd gathered, but when he got to Mossman's place he was still sweating.

Al was very surprised to see us with a blackfellow. He stood there on the front porch, peering at us through his watery eyes. He wore a dirty shirt and no tie and he needed a shave. Yeah, he dressed as though he hadn't a cent in the world, though he owned streets of houses in Toowong.

"What do you want?" he said, gloomily, with that suspicious look you see in a guy's eyes when he thinks you've come to put the bite on him.

"Take us somewhere private where we can talk," I said.

He shuffled off to a fly-spotted little back-room he used as an office, and there we put our proposition before him. At first he wasn't very impressed, and he begun to look gloomier than ever. He was the most melancholy guy I ever saw, and always seemed on the point of bursting into tears—though believe me, Mac, it wasn't him that needed to do any weeping, it was the people that did business with him!

"How do I know he's as fast as you say he is?" he muttered, poking Woola-Woola all over with his bony finger, and feeling his muscles.

"We'll show you," I told him.

So we all went down to the lonely river flats in back of the cemetery, and after scouting around to make sure there weren't any onlookers we let Woola-Woola do his stuff. He was on the top of his form, and even Al, who wasn't any athlete, could see that he was practically supersonic. But Al was still a bit doubtful.

"I don't like deals with blackfellows in 'em," he said. "There's laws about these aborigines."

"There's only the one about not giving 'em any likker," put in Joe. "And we ain't likely to break that."

"If I put up the money, what's my cut?" Mossman wanted to know.

"A third," I said. "Share and share alike."

"Nothin' doing!" he grunted. "Suppose I put up a thousand, and something happens? You can't tell. He might fall sick, or twist his ankle. I lose a thousand quid; you don't lose nothing. Call that a fair deal? I want a half!"

Naturally me and Joe put up an awful howl. We pointed out all the hardships we'd undergone in bringing Woola-Woola to Brisbane. Hadn't we spotted his talent, and developed it? The idea was ours, wasn't it? Then we appealed to Al's better nature, which was a waste of time from the start.

"A half!" he said, wiping his eyes.

I looked at Joe, and Joe shrugged.

"O.K., Al!" I said. "A half."

Next day I hunted up Chubby Sheldon, and ran him to earth on the sports ground out at New Farm. Well, I couldn't have missed him. He wore the sort of clothes you could see a mile away—a check suit that would have knocked your eyes out, a Panama hat, a purple shirt and a cerise tie. A fat, red-faced guy, who never spoke below a shout. He was watching two of his wrestlers having a workout, urging them on with whoops and yells, and when he saw me he waved to me.

"Well, well, well, when did they let you out?" he roared. "Cripes, you're looking thin! They don't feed you any too well in pokey, do they?"

He always pulled out these bum jokes, but I laughed. After all, I was going to hook him for a few thousand, so I could afford to. I got talking to him, and gradually led the conversation round to his trackmen. I told him that we'd discovered a blackfellow that we figured was much faster than his Sydney Streak—and I had him!

"Want to bet on it?" he said, biting off the end of a cigar about a foot long.

I knew he'd say that! His gambling instincts were so strong that it was just plumb inevitable. From then on it was easy; merely a matter of fixing up the details. He suggested two thousand pounds a side, but I explained that Joe and me were in a syndicate with Mossman, and that we couldn't go above a thousand. Then I played my ace.

"You figure you're betting on a certainty, don't you?" I said.

"Practically," he admitted.

"Well, what odds will you give us if we let your boy have a ten yard start?" I asked him.

My gosh, you ought to have seen him! He nearly swallowed his cigar.

"There ain't a man living could give the Streak two yards start, let alone ten!" he shouted. "Why, you're crazier than a sunstruck bandicoot!"

"Crazy money is as good as any other," I told him. "What odds will you give?"

"Odds?" he roared. "Odds? I'll give you any odds. I'll give you two to one! No! I'll give you four to one! No! I'll give you five to one! In thousands!"

So that was that. It was a Tuesday then, and we arranged to have the race right there in the park, at dawn, on the Friday. We had to make it early because we didn't want a crowd. If the police had got wind of it they might have stopped it, and we didn't know how we stood with the law.

"But you bring your money in cash, Yank!" Chubby bellowed. "Five pound notes. None of Mossmann's dud checks!"

When we turned up with Woola-Woola on the Friday we found quite a crowd there after all. Word of it had gone around on the grapevine, and over a hundred of the toughest mugs in Brisbane were there, waiting.

It isn't the quiet, law-abiding section of a community that gets up at dawn to see a money match, brother. It's the sporting element. There were a few hard-looking gents from the backblocks in town to spend their year's earnings. There were swagmen and drifters and bums, of all shapes and sizes, and the gamblers who couldn't keep away from the sight of big money changing hands. And there were some out-and-out criminals who would have murdered a blind cripple for the price of a drink. And not a cop in sight!

Chubby had brought his money in a big leather bag, and he had his whole stable there as a sort of bodyguard. Al had our dough in a sack, and he was quite indignant when Chubby insisted on counting it.

"It isn't that I don't think you're honest, Al," Chubby told him. "It's just that business is business."

THE crowd was strung out on both sides of the running track, and there wasn't a sound as the two runners took up their position, with the Sydney Streak ten paces ahead of Woola-Woola.

The Streak was a finely built kid, looking very natty in his short running pants, spiked shoes, and cotton vest. All Woola-Woola had on was a pair of shorts we'd cut down from an old pair of Al's pants. He was bare-footed and bare-headed, and he looked a bit scary and nervous. But I didn't mind that. It showed he was keyed-up. One of Chubby's trainers was the starter, and as he raised the pistol I got suddenly frightened.

Suppose something went wrong? Suppose Woola-Woola got confused, and didn't start when the gun went off? Suppose—and then, bang! And right then I knew that the money was as good as in my pocket. Only if Woola-Woola fell could the Sydney Streak hope to win. And Woola-Woola didn't fall. He caught the Streak up in a few paces, shot past him, and broke the tape so far ahead that the Sydney boy might as well have been part of another race. It was all over in a shade over six seconds—the most incredible hundred yards in the history of track running.

Chubby was stunned. He kept staring at Woola-Woola, and muttering, "He ain't human! No one runs as fast as that. He ain't human!"

But he was a good loser, I'll say that for him. After all, he was a millionaire, and a few thousand was only so much loose change to him. He made quite a little ceremony of the pay-off, and we all gathered round while he made a little speech, saying how much he envied us owning Woola-Woola.

"I only wish he was in my stable," he said.

Then he opened the bag, and there was the great pile of lovely crisp five pound notes. I'd never seen so much cash money in my life—and one thousand of it was mine, brother! At last my luck had changed. At last . . .

And then I heard a sound that froze the blood in my veins. It came from Woola-Woola. I looked at him, and I saw the look in his eyes. He was staring at Chubby Sheldon, and licking his lips, and going, "Woola-woola-woola!"

"Look out, Joe! Stop him!" I screamed. But I was too late.

You can see how it was, Mac. Poor old Woola-Woola hadn't tasted meat for a long, long time. For weeks and weeks he'd been living on that moldy old vegetarian diet, and he was fed up with it. We'd hoped he'd forgotten all about meat, but after all he was a cannibal, and I suppose cannibals never really forget. And the sight of Chubby Sheldon, plump and pink and juicy, must have been too much for him. Anyway, he gave a sudden growl, deep in his throat, and he bared his teeth and reached out those long arms of his, and he sprang at Chubby.

I never knew Chubby was a runner before, but right then he proved that necessity is the mother of acceleration. He gave a sort of strangled yelp, and he turned, and he lit out of there with Woola-Woola close on his heels. And if the Sydney Streak, who was in a favorable position to do it, handn't suddenly shoved out his leg and tripped the blackfellow and sort of delayed him, there's no telling what might have happened.

As Chubby ran he threw away the bag of money, and four thousand pounds in notes went skittering on the grass or fluttering in the morning breeze.

I didn't see what happened to Chubby, though we heard afterwards that he ran all the way to Fortitude Valley before collapsing from exhaustion just outside Warwick Street Railway Station. I didn't see because I was knocked down in the rush.

Yeah, in those few seconds I was trampled on by about fifty of Brisbane's toughest citizens, and all I got out of it was one badly-torn five-pound note and two mashed fingers. By the time I staggered to my feet the money had gone, and all I could see was a lot of hard-faced bozos running off in all directions with their hands in their pockets.

A little way off Woola-Woola lay on the ground. He'd been kicked on the head, which was a lucky break for Chubby. When I helped him up he was still dazed, though not seriously hurt.

"For Pete's sake, let's get him away from here and feed him some meat before he causes any more trouble," I said to Joe. "As a money-maker he's a bust. I was toying with the idea of selling him to Chubby, but I don't think Chubby will want him now. What's more, the cops are sure to start asking a lot of questions, so we'll have to hide him out somewhere till the trouble blows over."

"We'll take 'im to Charlie's!" said Joe, buttoning up his coat in a most purposeful manner. "I said I wouldn't, but this is a emergency, and blood's thicker than water."

It was a most disastrous morning, but as we turned to hustle Woola-Woola away I saw something that cheered me up a heap. It was Al Mossman, on his knees, rocking himself most pitiful to behold. Three of his front teeth were missing, he had a lump on his head, and some unethical character had swiped his sack with the thousand pounds in it. There wasn't any doubt about it, Mac; Nemesis had finally caught up with Al!

Well, that all happened a long time ago, but you can check up on the details if you're ever in Australia. Just go to the Quigley Brothers' Meat Market, in South Brisbane, and ask for Woola-Woola. He's the odd-job man there, and it's a most satisfactory arrangement all round, because he does all the heavy work and the Quigleys don't have to pay him any wages, but just keep him in meat. He's as tame as a house-cat, he goes to church with Charlie Quigley every Sunday, and he's so fat he couldn't run a hundred yards if he had to save his life.

I'm glad things worked out so well for him, because I was fond of the poor, faithful savage, and hunger can be a terrible thing. Almost as bad as thirst.

Well, thanks. Same again, I guess.

Yeah, I said the Quigley Brothers. You see, Joe bought a partnership in the shop for a thousand pounds, much to the surprise of all his friends and acquaintances. They never could figure out where a bum like him ever got hold of a thousand quid, though I believe Al Mossman has a pretty good idea.

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LITTLE GIANT

A FACT STORY

By DAVID LAVENDER

Since neither sleds nor wagons could budge, little Otto stepped out on foot.

IN 1865 southwestern Colorado was a formidable land. Except for the scratches of a few white and Mexican squatters in the San Luis Valley, there were no farms, no mines, no towns, no roads. Certainly there was no apparent opportunity to atract a penniless, Russian-born orphan whose tiny five-foot frame had already been kicked around half the globe.

Yet southwestern Colorado was the place where Otto Mears decided to stay. Rolling up his sleeves, he made himself the little giant of the gigantic San Juan Mountains. Almost single-handed he eased the Utes out of Colorado. With

ILLUSTRATED BY EVERETT RAYMOND KINSTLER

no backing other than his own nerve, he spiraled wagon roads and then zany little narrow-gauge railroads over the avalanche-shattered ranges which blocked the way to treasures in mineral, timber and grass.

It was a long pull. Born in eastern Russia of an English father and a Jewish mother, Otto Mears had been orphaned at the age of four. Until he was nine a maternal aunt put up with him. But she had twelve children of her own, and undersized Otto was definitely the ugly duckling. Off he went on a lumber vessel to one of his father's relatives in England. But he was not wanted there either, and was packed on to another uncle in New York, and then by native dugout and horseback over the Isthmus of Panama to the gold-crazy town of San Francisco. In the bay city his supply of kin ran out. No one had heard of the uncle he sought. Forlorn and friendless, Otto Mears, just turned eleven, stood literally at the ends of the earth.

CALIFORNIA in the 1850's was hard enough for a grown man to survive, let alone a youngster. Otto sold newspapers, milked cows, helped freighters wrestle merchandise into warehouses, clerked in a store. Rootless, he bummed from goldfield to goldfield, and in later life remembered the kaleidoscope of dreary towns largely by the size of the meals he cadged in them.

When he was twenty, the Civil War erupted. Taking out naturalization papers, the always-hungry Otto enlisted in the First Regiment of California volunteers. In New Mexico he received a sizzling baptism of fire at the battles of Valverde and Pigeon's ranch, then was shunted off into Kit Carson's Indian-pacifying "army" of 375 men. The snows were deep that bitter January of 1864; marching was frozen hell. But Kit kept the boys going, trapped 7000 Navajos at Cañon de Chelly and broke the resistance of the tribe forever. Later on, when Kit needed help with another tribe, he remembered the pint-sized soldier who had shivered out the Navajo campaign beside him.

After his discharge, Otto drifted north into southern Colorado's magnificent San Luis Valley. And there the twenty-four-year-old veteran hung up his hat. With the help of Mexican labor he hand-sowed 200 acres of land to wheat, reaped it with scythes, threshed it with flails—and netted an astounding sixty bushels per acre.

The only markets for that much wheat were the new gold mining towns at the head of the Arkansas River. Otto shoveled the grain into a few high-sided wagons (he had no sacks) and with half a dozen roustabouts took off. No roads. They rolled boulders, felled trees, and plowed their own level stretches as they labored over 9,000-foot Poncha Pass. While they were at it, along came William Gilpin, ex-governor of Colorado Territory and owner of a ranch in San Luis Valley. At Gilpin's advice, Otto chartered his wheel ruts as a toll road, though there was so little traffic that it hardly seemed worth the five dollars which the charter cost.

Later on, that inauspicious seed would blossom into the Rockies' most fabulous transportation system, but Otto did not foresee the growth. Stowing the charter away, he built an adobe store on his homestead at Saguache Creek, in order to catch the trade of the Ute Indians who swarmed through the valley. Meanwhile a new county had been created in the district, and now began a tug-of-war for its seat. Otto favored the cluster of cabins growing up around his mud store; others favored the rival shacks of Milton. After a furious season of politicking, intimidation and charges of bribery, the mud store won by six votes (which outraged Miltonites charged were cast by Otto's oxen) and the town of Saguache, pronounced si-watch, came into being. Headquarters for the Indian trade, for ranchers, for prospectors and for the huge freight outfits that soon would be supplying the mammoth mines of the San Juans, it quickly boomed into one of the toughest towns of the Rockies.

Otto Mears boomed with it. Elected county treasurer at the age of twenty-seven, he collected taxes in hides, furs and wool, hauled the stuff to Denver, converted it to cash, and used any excess for buying goods that he freighted back

to his store, along with consignments to the Indian Agency. It was a makeshift outfit he ran, but it was backed by tremendous bluff. When the narrow-gauge Denver & Rio Grande Railroad nosed into Pueblo, Otto won himself rate concessions to Denver by threatening to undercut the railroad's traffic with an ox-team line!

But his main business was with the Utes. By dickering with them over dog-meat feasts in their flea-infested wickiups, he had learned their tongue-twisting language better than any other man in southern Colorado. Accordingly, Kit Carson called on Otto to act as interpreter during the negotiation of the 1868 treaty whereby the Utes gave up their San Luis Valley lands and agreed to move to the western slope of the Continental Divide. Then suddenly Kit died at Fort Lyon. The Indians refused to move. War drums boomed and settlers reached for their guns. Alarmed army generals called for Otto Mears. What should they do? The bearded, dark-skinned little roustabout cocked his round Russian cap over one eye, told the brass hats to keep their shirts on, and went into a huddle with Chief Ouray. What passed between them nobody knows. But in the end the Utes moved peacefully across the Divide.

They had hardly settled before silver was discovered in the heart of their holdings. The government tried to keep faith with the Indians by ordering troops to drive out trespassing prospectors. The outraged miners howled defiance, and the situation bordered on civil war, with the Utes prepared to scalp stragglers from either side. As a compromise the government tried to purchase the disputed mineral lands from the Indians, but Commissioner Felix Brunot got nowhere. In despair he called on Otto Mears. The sawed-off trader cooked up a million-dollar deal with Ouray, the San Juan Mountains were sold to the United States, and southwestern Colorado's silver stampede was on.

AS a gesture of friendship the delighted Brunot took Otto, Ouray, and several lesser chiefs back to Washington. At a reception in the White House, Otto Mears, the once unwanted urchin of the San Francisco alleyways, shook hands with the top bigwigs of the United States. Acting as interpreter, he introduced President Grant to Ouray as the Indians' "great father." Ouray thereupon embraced the president's wife as his great mother, the president's daughter as his great sister!

As a reward for his services, Otto had already been appointed Indian trader at the new agency on the Gunnison River. To supply himself he constructed a road over Cochetopa Pass from Saguache; and with the opening of the San Juans, he chewed a rough and rutted "highway" on up the Lake Fork of the Gunnison to a highly mineralized region where a prospector named Packer had eked out the previous winter by devouring his five comrades.

Very few people used this ninety-six-mile toll road. To stimulate traffic Otto set up a newspaper in a tent, appointed Harry Wood editor and turned out an issue extolling the wonders of "Lake City"—as yet non-existent. With a pack of this news on his back, Wood in January snowshoed over the Continental Divide and scattered the papers throughout the San Luis Valley. The next spring the rush was on, Lake City became a fact, and each new arrival put another toll charge in Otto's pockets.

He needed every dime. He was expanding too fast. When the Ute Agency moved from Gunnison to the Uncompahgre River, he had to build another hundred-mile road to keep up with it. This road he extended on to the cliff-girdled camp of Ouray, most spectacularly beautiful mining town in America. Behind him, in Saguache, creditors cracked down on his store and freight outfits. To stave off ruin Otto in the winter of 1875 made a desperate crossing to the Uncompahgre, persuaded the agent to sign vouchers for goods to be delivered in the spring, and snowshoed back within a week, a record-breaking, blizzard-swept 270-mile round trip on foot.

The journey convinced him that the Uncompahgre's winter isolation had to be broken. In 1876, when Colorado became a state, Otto Mears was one of the

electors who carried her first presidential vote back to Washington. There he wangled a government mail contract for a once-a-week service to Ouray, with a heavy penalty attached for failure to maintain schedules. Rushing back to Colorado, he built a string of relay stations and started the service in the dead of winter with dog sleds. Towering spring snowfalls, turned into bottomless mush by sudden thaws, nearly spelled disaster. Drivers refused to tackle the trails. Avalanches roared; streams were howling maelstroms of slush ice. Since neither sleds nor wagons could budge, Otto strapped the huge mailsack to his scrawny shoulders and stepped out on foot into the morass. It took him a week to slog seventy-five miles, but he saved his contract.

Western Colorado was filling up. Settlers as well as miners were demanding access to Indian lands. Friction exploded with the Meeker Massacre in the northern part of the state, and all Colorado roared for the removal of the Indians to a new reservation in the desert regions of eastern Utah. Mears was appointed one of the commissioners to buy 11,000,000 acres of their Colorado land, but the terms of the treaty confused the headmen and they refused to sign until Otto jumped in a buggy, loaded on a couple of barrelsful of his own silver dollars, and drove about the reservation, handing out cash for signatures.

WITH the Indians gone, Otto built a new toll road over Marshall Pass into the now booming Gunnison country and promptly sold it for $40,000 to a railroad which wanted to use the grade for a track bed. The Leadville silver strike sent so much produce over his original Poncha Pass highway that in three months the tolls paid both its construction cost and the expenses of a dozen years' maintenance. As the stampede into the San Juans grew, Otto spiraled roads over thirteen passes from ten to more than eleven thousand feet in elevation. When he collected toll receipts from his far-flung stations, he dashed about in a silver-mounted buggy.

And still he was not satisfied. By now narrow-gauge railroads had penetrated southwestern Colorado, but none of these outside companies dared tackle the thundering passes of the San Juans. So Otto Mears, between 1889 and 1891, raised upwards of ten million dollars and drove his own rails over some of the crookedest, steepest, dizziest grades in America. A motley mob of passengers cheerfully bought tickets for a staggering twenty-cents per mile.

Then, almost overnight, the panic of 1893 and the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act closed nearly every silver mine in western Colorado. Otto's mountain empire crashed. Flat broke, he went East, caught his breath by building a railroad from Washington, D. C., to the Chesapeake Bay, and then became the first president of the Mack Truck Company. But he was not happy turning wheels from a New York City office. In 1907 he returned to the San Juans, where people still swore by God and by Otto Mears.

He repaid their trust. In 1912, late fall floods shattered every means of communication between the town of Silverton and the outside world. The trapped residents were panic-stricken. They had not yet laid in their winter supplies, and railroad officials said the life-saving tracks through mile-deep Animas Canyon could not be cleared for months.

That "foreign" railroad was nothing to Otto Mears. But the town was. Although seventy-one years old, he rounded up several work engines, persuaded housewives and mill owners to give him their last precious bits of coal, hired 275 workers, climbed into the lead engine, and marshaled the desperate race against winter. The track was cleared in weeks, not months, and Silverton was saved.

Today Otto Mear's portrait, in stained glass, shines in a high window of the Colorado State Capitol at Denver, a ponderous edifice whose construction he helped supervise back in the 1890's and whose dome he covered with gold leaf. But for his own monument he selected the mountains. When the little giant died in 1931, aged ninety, his ashes, in accordance with his last request, were scattered without ceremony over the lofty divide between Silverton and Lake City.

ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

THE GRIM TALE of "Headless Valley"—and dead men's gold.

Query:—Recently I read a magazine article on the Nehannie Valley (Headless Valley). It seems this so-called forbidden valley is full of untold wealth and that few men have been into it. What ones have, have met with mysterious accidents. Mr. Henderson was one who came out with some of the gold, and the story of the Valley. He also claims when this rush does start, that it will make '98 look small. I don't doubt Mr. Henderson's story, though I would like more confirmation of it. Can you give me any information?

—D. W. Hatch
San Pedro, Calif.

Reply by Philip H. Godsell:—"Headless Valley" is a newspaper name coined by imaginative reporters and has no existence in fact, and no place on any map. Actually it refers to a valley in the heart of The Nehannie Mountains northeast of Fort Nelson which is now served by the Alaska Highway. As a matter of fact I don't suppose anyone is much better qualified than myself to speak on this region, since I have, directly and indirectly, been associated with the dramatic incidents arising out of the search for the Lost McLeod Mine in Dead Man's Valley since as far back as 1912, and was, I think, the first to write up the subject for various newspapers and magazines, including the story of the "Tropical Valley" in the vicinity of the scene of the McLeod murders.

It was from Old Man Beatton, Hudson's Bay factor at Fort St. John, B.C., where I was trading for the Revillon Freres Trading Company back in 1912, that I first heard of a "tropical valley in the sub-Arctic" and the search for dead men's gold. It was a weird story of prehistoric monsters disporting themselves in a tropical oasis somewhere to the northward; of a lost mine, murdered prospectors, outlaw Indians and hidden gold.

I'd been trading beaver skins and lynx pelts from a band of Beaver Indians when the sternwheeler came in to a landing and I was met at the gangplank by Constable Hidson of the B.C. Provincial Police who handed me a letter. It was from Attorney General Bowser of British Columbia and requested me—seeing that I spoke the Indian language—to make inquiries amongst the Fort St. John Indians regarding Frank and Willie McLeod, who'd disappeared amongst the mountains to the northward (the Nehannies), and were thought to be held captive by outlaw Indians, then roaming the western ranges.

The Indians weren't talking and I finally dropped in on Factor Beatton, who was a sort of uncrowned king amongst the wandering fur hunters who traded at the fort. Eight years before, in the summer of 1904, he told me, Willie McLeod, son of Murdoch McLeod, factor at Fort Liard had heard of gold in the Nehannies and he'd packed an outfit and headed for the country held taboo by all the Indian tribes on account of some superstition. Somewhere up in these mountains he made a strike, headed south, only to have his canoe capsize, and reach Fort Liard, more dead than alive, with a small flask containing four ounces of flake gold. Next year, with his brother Frank, and an engineer named Ware, Willie headed again into the Nehannies against the warning of the Indians. Two years elapsed without a word except moccan telegraph rumors that spread from tepee to tepee and fort to fort that the men had been murdered by hostile Indians. Finally a band of Slavey Indians arrived at Fort Liard and reported having run across Ware, heading west across the mountains towards the sea (the Pacific) and traveling *alone!*

Convinced his brothers had met with foul

play Charlie, eldest of the McLeod boys, trailed Ware across the Rockies and finally caught up with him spending like a drunken sailor in a waterfront saloon in Vancouver. Ware told a weird story of the party being dogged by Indians, of attempts on their lives which resulted in the party finally breaking up at the mouth of the South Nehannie, and dividing their pokes of gold. Frank and Willie, he said, had headed east to Fort Simpson while he decided to go west to the Pacific Coast. Unbelieving, Charlie haunted the man till he let out the approximate spot where the find had been made. Heading back to Fort Liard, Charlie managed to follow the two-year old trail of the party till he reached a spot where he found old axe cuttings. Parting the bushes he came upon an old campsite and lying with feet towards the charred firepiece were two bodies, one enshrouded in a bullet-riddled blanket and the other outstretched on his face with his finger still on the trigger of his Winchester. It wasn't hard to reconstruct the story. Ware had evidently got gold-crazy, shot Willie as he slept, and then shot Frank as he was awakened by the shot and grabbed for his rifle. Charlie had buried the bodies and returned to Fort Resolution where he remained for a while as interpreter for the H.B.C., then went outside, vowing to avenge his brothers' murder.

That was all old Beatton could tell me. But, warmed with a few shots of Old Buck rum he added that somewhere near the murder spot—now known as Dead Man's Valley—the Indians said there was a tropical valley wherein dinosaurs and mastodons of a forgotten age disported themselves in steaming pools rich with luxurious vegetation. Perhaps these ideas originated from Indian reports of huge mammoths being at times exposed by the falling away of glacial ice-cliffs, leaving their flesh, when thawed—though millions of years old—still fit for dog-food. However, the greatest impetus to this legend, I found, arose from a story told by an Indian, named Chequina, to some scientists in the Athabasca country. His father, he said, had wintered with a primitive tribe near the headwaters of the Peace and come across a band of Stone-Age Indians. Around their lodge fires they spoke of a "medicine" valley to the northward, untouched by winter snows, where strange monsters of fearful size and ferocity roamed. On a piece of skin one of the hunters had sketched a representation of one of these monsters, which drawing had been treasured by his family. Then from his medicine-bag he produced a stained scrap of buckskin. And upon it, plain but unmistakable, was the outline of a dinosaur!

Years later, while inspecting the Hudson's Bay Company's trading posts in this region by dog-team, I found myself at Fort Liard, chatting with Fred McLeod, brother of the two boys who'd disappeared in the Nehannies, Fred having succeeded his father as factor. He practically repeated Beatton's story adding that the country to the northward was thought by the Indians to be haunted by a race of troglodytes, twice the size of ordinary humans, who went about naked save for their coating of evil-smelling hair, and lost no chance to carry off any Indians, and especially squaws who might venture into the Nehannie Mountains.

In 1927, I was at Fort Resolution when I again came in touch with Dead Man's Valley. The first plane to ever arrive there dropped from the sky and Doc Oakes of the N.A.M.E., told me he was on his way to look for the Lost McLeod mine in Dead Man's Valley and had with him Jake Davidson, two other miners and Charlie McLeod, as guide. I had a long chat with Charlie and off they went. A few days later Doc Oakes returned feeling pretty blue. He said they were unable to locate the little lake near the gold-find, which Charlie had figured on using for a landmark, and he had left the men somewhere near Dead Man's Valley with grub, ammunition, a collapsible canoe and intended to have them root around for the mine and pick them up in the fall.

That same September I was at Fort Simpson waiting for the sternwheeler *Distributor* to take me south to my headquarters at Fort Smith, when the door opened and four ragged, bearded and smoke-begrimed scarecrows stumbled in. It was Charlie McLeod and his party. Doc Oakes hadn't shown up, and fearful of being caught by winter in those forbidding ranges they'd killed and jerked a moose, bolted their small canoe together and committed themselves to the bosom of some nameless stream. Swirled at racehorse speed by their cockleshell craft they seemed to be borne into the bowels of the earth, the rock walls, thousands of feet high, closing in till the only daylight visible was a silver thread in the blackness where the sky showed far overhead. Swept to the brink of tumultuous cascades, they somehow managed to survive the journey. All summer they'd searched in vain for the lost mine but in their rambles had found themselves in the "tropical valley" of legendary fame. But not the romantic oasis of rumor. Neither were there any living dinosaurs or pterodactyls to impede their footsteps. Mud volcanoes there were in plenty, sending up coils of white vapor and geysers of sulphurous water, while the moss was scored with a spider's web of game trails. In their wanderings they stumbled on the skeleton of a giant white man beside a tumble-down cabin with his bent rifle beside him. According to the age of wood cuttings he'd been dead for some fifteen years. Naturally, the skull was gone, carried off by foxes, wolves or other predators.

Charlie and I traveled up to Fort Smith on the steamer and I saw him embark on the last outgoing scow of the season at Fort Fitzgerald. But for wandering prospectors this Lost McLeod Mine continued to hold the same allure as a candle-flame does for moths. Led by Angus Hall of Myerthope another band of gold-seekers decided to brave the unknown terrors of the Nehannies. Within

sight of Dead Man's Valley, Hall hurried on alone—anxious to be the first to see the mine—only to disappear completely.

More mysterious still was the fate of Martin Jorgensen, who left Fort Simpson to be swallowed up in the maw of the Nehannies. Months later a ragged Slavey staggered into Fort Simpson with a grease-stained note for Poole Field, Northern Traders factor. It was from Jorgensen urging him to follow—he'd struck it rich. Hiring half-breed guides Poole took up the trail only to stumble over the headless body of Martin Jorgensen near the mouth of the Flatt River—struck down apparently, by some nameless killer. Later I was able to bring to the relatives of Martin Jorgensen, through my articles in the press, word of his fate. They'd been searching for him for twenty years, when my story brought them the sad news of his unfortunate and tragic fate!

Next to disappear was an old trapper friend of mine, Bill Powers, in whose cabin I'd spent the night while on the trail from Fort St. John to Fort Nelson not long before. When a year elapsed without a word a police posse took up the search. Beyond the spot where Jorgensen's headless body had been found they discovered the bodies of lynx and foxes in untended traps, then a sawed-off .30-30 rifle. Farther upstream was the charred ruin of a cabin, and amongst the debris a blackened human skeleton. Again there was talk of murder.

Finally Jack Stannier, an old Yukon sourdough, found out that Willie McLeod had confided to the care of Father Le Guen, who was at Fort Liard at the time, a map showing the location of his find. Seeking out the priest at Fort Providence they went through mildewed papers and finally found the map, with an X marking the site of the mine. With Stan MacMillan of the Mackenzie Air Service, Stannier headed into the Nehannies, and discovered old sluice-boxes, rusted gold-pans and so forth—and signs of gold. But he was as far from the mother lode as ever. . .

And still they go in . . . and still they disappear. Within the last seven years about the same number of men have disappeared mysteriously in their search for the McLeod gold. While I've no doubt gold will be found somewhere up in that region some day, it's a safe bet to discard all these wild newspaper stories about the fabulously rich valley, or valleys for that matter. The McLeods did find gold—or at least a pocket of it—but nobody since has found gold anywhere up there outside of a little color—only lots of heartbreaks due, I imagine, largely to their being inadequately equipped. There was a gold-rush in there some ten years ago, that resulted in no appreciable results. Charlie McLeod is living in Edmonton, none the richer for his association with those who did find gold. As for the headless bodies, some newspaper reporters who made a comfortable trip in by plane to investigate the stores of "Headless Valley" as they called it, stated they were searching for a race of "headhunters" which I had maintained existed up there, in which they were handling the truth somewhat carelessly. Sure, there were headless bodies—but anyone who's been in that country, and knew what it was all about, would realize that the heads had been tugged or pulled by marauding animals into the bush and gnawed at.

There's an interesting climax to the story of the McLeod murders. Charlie, after a thirty years' search, ran down Ware, who was working near Edmonton under an assumed name. Fearful that the hangman would get him, Ware fled to his farm in Saskatchewan where Charlie followed him. Seeing Charlie coming down the road he climbed a haystack, set fire to it, and put a bullet through his brain.

Mr. Henderson came out all right, but as far as I know he was never in Dead Man's Valley and certainly didn't have any gold to my knowledge.

There, in brief, is the story of "Headless Valley" for what it is worth—and I wouldn't advise you to place any credence in highly colored stories of easily attainable wealth up there.

NEST EGG—King-size.

Query:—I have heard a great many arguments about whether a setting hen will sit on a cobra's, or any other kind of a snake's egg, and hatch it, or whether she will know by instinct what it is and pick it to pieces. Which is right?

—James Marten Clingen
Marcy, N. Y.

Reply by Clifford H. Pope:—The question you ask is not easily answered because, in all probability, no one has ever carried on scientific experiments with setting hens and snake eggs. The carefully studied reactions of the goose to foreign bodies in the nest have shown that when the foreign body is much larger, smaller, or markedly different in any other way, it is rejected.

Therefore, I would guess that a cobra's egg the size of a hen's egg would not be noticed, whereas one much smaller or larger would be rejected. It *is* possible that the difference in shape between the hen's egg and the cobra's egg would cause a hen to reject the latter; the hen does not use the sense of smell in her examination of foreign bodies.

I took an egg that measured 2⅜ inches from a Chinese cobra, so some cobras certainly lay eggs as big as a hen's egg. The king cobra's egg may well be too big; I fail to find a report on its size.

THE Colt Navy .36 revolver.

Query:—I have been a gun collector for a long time but until now, have never been able to get a .36 caliber cap-and-ball Colt. I have just obtained two and have another

(Continued on page 116)

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

THE ASK ADVENTURE SERVICE is free, provided self-addressed envelope and FULL POSTAGE for reply are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries must enclose International Reply Coupons, which are exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. **Air Mail** is quicker for foreign service!

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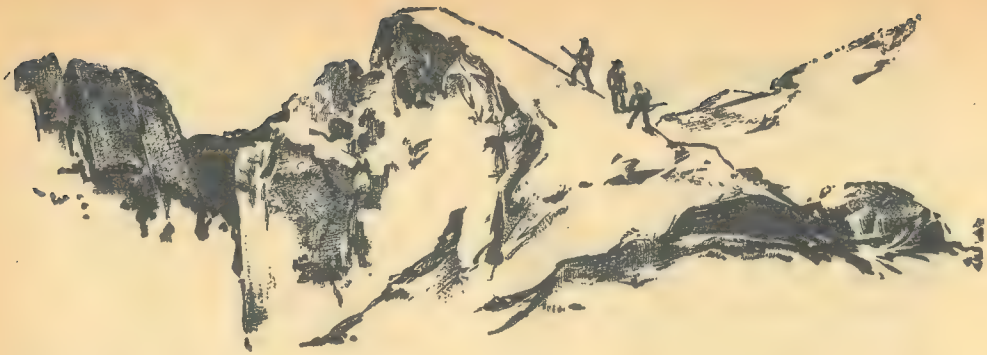

THE TRAIL AHEAD

For five days Danny Laird had been guiding Colonel John Gordon, U.S.A., military attaché to the American Embassy in Nanking, V. I. P. and sportsman extraordinary, up and down and around and behind the 18,000-foot range that climbed along the Chinese-Tibetan border west of Kang-ting. They were supposed to be hunting blue sheep but to date Gordon hadn't fired a shot. Laird had made allowances for Gordon's age, inexperience and lack of acclimatization—for fifty dollars a day plus expenses he was prepared to put up with a good deal, even from a colonel. But several facts, trivial in themselves, had begun to puzzle and irritate him. Why, for instance, had Gordon chosen to make the difficult and expensive trip into Sikong out of season? Why had he insisted that they hunt alone, with just the native guide, Shu, instead of the customary crew of horse wranglers and camp servants? Above all, why had he been so interminably curious—about everything but the game they were stalking. . . . And then the big zebra-striped ram appeared, silhouetted motionless against the skyline and a rifle cracked—but it was not the ram that stumbled and pitched forward to fall from the precipitous peak—and Laird began to understand the situation he'd gotten himself into. . . . Don't miss this absorbing novelette of one of the teeming trouble spots of the Far East, where the ancient ways of the Orient have come face to face with the conflicts of today—

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(Continued from page 112)

in sight. Can you tell me what the original finish was like? Was it blue? Those I have have been somewhat rusted, not bad but the original finish is non-existent. As a relic is it better to clean them up and oil them or to re-blue?

Do you know where I can buy parts, such as bullet mold, powder flask, nipples, etc.?

I understand that the .36 was the Navy gun during the Civil War period. How was the loading material carried?

I have a .44 in this type of gun which I have shot many times with reduced loads and was surprised to find it pretty accurate. Is the .36 accurate also—in good shape of course.

—Harry H. Hyatt
Grass Valley, Calif.

Reply by Donegan Wiggins:—The standard finish on the Colt Navy .36 revolvers was a fine blue, although some presentation pieces, such as my own, were beautifully engraved, and with silver or gold plating. Any good gunsmith could re-blue the revolver for you in case you so desire; I can suggest the following firm, in case this appeals to you: The Pacific Gunsight Co., 353 Hayes Street, San Francisco.

You can secure spare parts, molds, etc., as well as interesting books on these arms, from my good friend James Serven, P.O. Box 1777, Santa Ana, California.

Most men carrying these revolvers seem to have depended upon loose ammo, bullets, cap and powderflask, in pockets of a leather pouch, but so-called "skin" or waterproof complete charges of powder and bullet, in goldbeaters skin, in packets of six, were also to be had for those who wished to be sure of proper ignition in wet weather. Colonel Craig told me he used to drip melted candle grease over bullets and caps after charging his cylinder, I recall.

To secure the best results, one should lubricate the bore a bit, as favored by the late Henry Walter Fry, or grease the loaded bullets *lightly* with some very heavy cup grease, to keep the powder fouling soft, and facilitate cleaning afterwards. Using these methods, I have found the Colt and Remington cap-and-ball revolver satisfactory for accuracy at practical handgun ranges in past experiments.

LISTLESS Cairo or Gay Paree?

Query:—I am seeking some information about Egypt—about "listless, fragrant Cairo", as Frank Gervasi calls it in an old *Collier's*. I'm eligible for a couple of years' education on the G.I. Bill of Rights for U.S. servicemen, and am debating between Paris—the Sorbonne—and Cairo. Which would you advise? Would not Cairo be more interesting—certainly cheaper at the present rate of exchange—and, since I have an affinity for Arabs, might not I, there, get material to

write about them sympathetically? I'd want to study French (which I speak well enough to get by) and Arabic (of which I know nothing). I presume there is a University there. I wish I'd asked my friend Achmed Abdullah, in New York, before he died. I have the impression that he went there a short while. Would it be possible to live reasonably in Cairo, once one got away from Shepheard's, etc? The government will give us G.I.'s $50 a month, but of course I should take some money along myself.

Although I was stationed with minesweepers in the U. S. Navy for almost a year at the old French submarine base at Bizerte, and got down frequently to Tunis and even to Kairouan, I was never able to wangle enough leave to hop one of the planes that came through every day for Bengazi and Cairo.

—Paul Eldridge
Strong Ranch
Kane, Wyoming

Reply by Capt. H. W. Eades:—Moslems from all over the East come to study at the National University in Cairo, which has a highly qualified staff of European and Egyptian teachers, and at the religious University of Al-Azhar, which was founded nearly a thousand years ago and is the most famous institution of its kind in the Moslem world. You will be able to gauge its standard of learning from the fact that its curriculum is timed to last for fifteen years! Unless you were a Mohammedan, you might on the whole have an extremely thin time if you went to Al-Azhar. Nor would you learn much that would be of practical value to you in later life. The National University, on the other hand, is similar to many State Colleges in the United States, as far as my information goes, and you *might* like it. You would find a preponderance of native Egyptians there, with plenty of Italians, Greeks and other nationalities who live along the rim of the Mediterranean. There is a new University in the Soudan (at Khartoum, I believe) staffed with capable English and other instructors, and teaching modern courses, but the students would nearly all be native and Mohammedan.

My choice would certainly lie in the Sorbonne. This famous old university ranks with others like Oxford, Cambridge, Heidelberg (pre-war), Lausanne, and Harvard. You would require good educational attainments before you would gain admission, but you would meet bright, clever people from all parts of the civilized world, including many Arabs from North Africa.

Personally I would count it a privilege to be able to attend the hoary old Sorbonne (if I could get in) but you wouldn't get me into Al-Azhar other than for a very short visit.

WATCH your step!

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I will soon enter and explore an area which contains quicksand. Of this I have no knowledge whatever except hearsay. It has always been given a very ominous and dangerous reputation in certain types of literature. What are the facts? Where is it found, and how does one identify it? I am going alone into this territory and if your answers support hearsay, it will greatly modify my trip.

—W. H. Flockhart
1615 Central
Kansas City, Mo.

Reply by Paul M. Fink:—Unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on the viewpoint, my personal experience with quicksands and the like has been limited to a small amount of midleg-deep swamp, so I fear I'm going to have little first hand information to offer you, or much of any kind, to tell the truth. If your life might depend on following what I might tell you, be certain I'm going to know the 100% accuracy of any advice I'd give.

Quicksand, morass, swamp or what have you, is simply sand or other matter so full of water that it will not support any weight, so that any animal, man or heavy object will sink into it, just as it would in water, though more slowly, of course. Therefore, if a suspected area has rocks lying upon it, it should be safe. Surface logs could not be relied upon, as they would float on water, and likewise on any aqueous solution.

Quicksand is found both in streams and on their borders, and I've heard that it is not uncommon in streams in the Plains section and other flat regions, where the streams are shallow and wide. But just what surface signs may be depended upon to indicate it, I can't say. Anyway, the same signs might well not hold true in different places. I'd suggest that you consult experienced travelers in the country you plan to visit.

If it were my expedition and the country had a reputation for hazardous footing, I'd not try it alone, but take along at least one more good man. In crossing suspicious spots, I'd always keep a few yards between us and a lariat or other rope handy.

INSIDE the ropes with the Heavyweight Champs, past and present.

Query:—I have some questions that I hope are in your field.

Did Jack Dempsey fight Jack Sharkey? If so, when, where, and what was the result?

Was Max Baer ever knocked out? I do not mean a technical knockout.

Do you know where I could secure any information about the Jack Johnson-Jim Jeffries fight. It seems that years ago I read a magazine article stating that Jeffries was talked into the fight and that he was frightened half to death.

In what manner did Primo Carnera defeat Jack Sharkey? Did Sharkey at any time hold the heavyweight title?

Have you any information about a match that was supposedly held between Farmer Burns, a wrestler, and a boxer whose name I have forgotten?

—William P. Reese
Magna, Utah

Reply by Col. Jean V. Grombach:—Jack Dempsey fought Jack Sharkey in the Yankee Stadium, New York City, January 21, 1927. This was Dempsey's major come-back fight after losing the world's heavyweight championship to Gene Tunney in Philadelphia. Dempsey only showed flashes of his old form from time to time and many people thought Sharkey was in control of the fight until a "bone-head" moment in the 7th round. In the 7th round Dempsey hit him with a terrific punch in the body which according to some was foul and according to others not. The majority believe that it was a fair punch exactly on the belt line. However, in any case, Sharkey dropped his hands and turned to complain to the referee. A second later the fight was over, for just as he turned Dempsey exploded his famous left hook on his chin and down went Sharkey for the full count. This win by Dempsey, declared fair by the referee and judges, led to the second Tunney fight at Soldiers' Field, Chicago, September 22, 1927.

Max Baer suffered three knockouts in his career. While technically speaking they might be technical knockouts, I would classify two of them as being pretty conclusive.

On September 24, 1935, Max Baer was knocked out in the 4th round by Joe Louis after taking an unmerciful beating and several knockdowns. He was on one knee and one hand as the referee counted ten. Many people believe that he could have continued. As Baer's representative behind Louis' corner at that fight, I believe he was hopelessly outclassed and that had he gotten up the referee would have stopped the fight a few seconds later. As Baer was counted out by the referee while still on the floor, according to the rules I do not believe this K.O. can be considered technical although I would admit that Baer was not on his back, nor on his face, and might have been able to get up.

On June 1st, 1939 Max Baer was knocked out by Lou Nova in the 11th round. This was definitely a technical knockout only. Baer was in very good shape, was doing well in the fight, but received a deep cut inside his mouth. This cut bled so much that it caused him to swallow so much blood that he began to choke up, so the referee stopped the fight and awarded it on a technical knockout to Nova. Baer was still strong, dangerous and not in bad shape.

Max Baer was knocked out in the 8th round on April 4, 1941 by Lou Nova in a fight in which he shot his bolt early, knocking Nova down in the 4th round but having nothing left for his task later. In the 8th round he was knocked down twice and was too weak to continue. The referee, seeing

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that Baer was helpless, stopped the fight. Although this was a technical knockout, there is no doubt that Baer would have received a haymaker and perhaps would have been seriously injured had the referee not stopped the fight.

I might add that Max Baer in his prime could probably never be knocked out by most anyone without a sledge hammer, but that Broadway and Hollywood night life and no training took his super stamina away from him.

The Jack Johnson-Jim Jeffries fight is described in detail in many books on American boxing, also in Jim Brady's book, Tex Rickard's wife's book, and in the book called "Ten and Out" by Alex Johnson. To sum up the Johnson-Jeffries fight, I can only tell you that Jeffries was so good he fought himself out of opponents by 1907 and retired, and that he was persuaded, at the age of 35, to come back in 1910. When he started training again he weighed 260 pounds and had not exercised in years. He was a pugilistic old man.

There was, however, nothing wrong with his courage but he could not possibly lose ten years though he trained down to 225 pounds. He was knocked out in the 15th round by Jack Johnson on July 4, 1910.

Primo Carnera knocked out Jack Sharkey on June 28, 1933, at the Long Island Bowl in the 6th round, with a sweeping righthand uppercut reminiscent of Jess Willard. Jack Sharkey did hold the world's heavyweight championship at that time, having won it by defeating Schmeling on June 21, 1932.

I have no specific information about the Farmer Burns matter except that there have been many boxer-wrestler fights staged for the entertainment of the public, with rather inconclusive results. In the golden age of boxing and the Olympics in Greece, there was an event called the Pancratium. This event pitted wrestlers and boxers against each other in a sort of rough and tumble free-for-all. The records show that wrestlers won more often than boxers for a very good reason. The boxers were not allowed gloves and as a result did more damage to their hands than to the wrestlers' heads. There have been boxer-wrestler matches in our time, but beyond the strange interest generated by such bouts, I do not believe any conclusions can be drawn.

EARLY days in the Lone Star State.

Query:—I wonder if you can give me some information on Northern Mexico.

I am very interested in the early history of Monclova, Coahuila, particularly during 1689-1691. Can you tell me if there is an agency in Monclova or Saltillo to whom I may write for information concerning historic buildings constructed by de Leon at that time, a map of the town, and a description of its surroundings?

—Lena Armstrong
Belton, Texas

Reply by J. W. Whiteaker:—Monclova is a small town and it is doubtful if any kind of records or maps of the place have been made or kept. The years 1689 to 1691 were the era of discoveries and missions in the now State of Texas and it has some bearing on the State of Coahuila also. Texas was, until 1824, a separate province of Mexico, but at that time Texas was joined to Coahuila, and the two provinces were changed into the "State of Coahuila, and Texas" with the capital located at Saltillo. As this arrangement caused the governor to live so great a distance from Texas, a Chief of the Department of Texas was appointed, with headquarters at San Antonio. This officer performed many of the duties of the Governor, but he was in all things dependent upon his superior officer. The whole plan of union with Coahuila was unpleasant to the Texans but they were promised that as soon as Texas reached a certain population she should become a separate State.

The great progress made during this era is best to be seen by comparison. In 1820 there were not more than 4000 civilized inhabitants in Texas, while in 1830 the State boasted 20,000 Americans alone. These Americans as we have seen, were not wild adventurers, but home-seekers, who came to live and to die in the land of their adoption.

The climate in certain districts of Coahuila is delightful; it is hot in the Rio Grande and Monclova regions, temperate in Viesca, Parras, and Saltillo and cold in the mountains. Abundant rainfalls characterize the district of Saltillo and Viesca, while in Parras and Monclova they are insufficient. Cattle raising, agriculture, and mining are leading industries of Coahuila.

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—Fern L. Moss
St. Petersburg, Fla.

Reply by Gordon MacCreagh:—Dear Venturesome—and most discriminating—Lady: I'm already envying you—what I mean, something surpassing the natural pity one has for a fellow Cracker living in Miami.

You want to know where to go and live in Africa, and apparently you are in a position to fulfill your wish. Were I that fortunate I wouldn't hesitate one fleeting minute, but I'd up and go to Durban, U.S.A. (Union of South Africa).

Durban has got—and I'm not supported by C. of C.—everything you've got—I mean, everything WE've got on the Gulf Coast. Only it never gets quite so hot or quite so cold! Mark that number one point.

Therefore Durban has all our flowers and trees and food stuffs. It has our Southern red-tile-roofed bungalows with closed patios. It has swimming, tennis, dancing, riding, sail-boating, everything. AND—now listen to this—it has them on lovely wooded heights and a cliff overhanging the sea, with rolling jungle hills in the background.

Durban has, too, up-to-date magnificent hotels; fine shops carrying complete lines of clothing, photographic goods, furniture; has hospitals, (mostly empty); has trolleys and busses and, much more picturesque, rickshas drawn by prancing Zulu boys dressed like African chiefs and King Lobengula; water supply, this being a white-man-administrated city, is plentiful and pure from the hills.

White population is some sixty thousand —mixed British and Africaans. Africaans, that's ex-Dutch-Boer, element is strong enough to tone down British superiority and to compel bi-lingual education and street signs.

Native population, Zulu, Kaffir, Basuto, approximately twenty thousand within city limits, though very variable, since they wander off to their kraals in the back hills as the African whim suits them and as soon as they've earned enough money to loaf a while. Indian (Hindu) population left over from early labor battalions, some sixty thousand in the whole colony.

Servants, therefore, are cheap and good, none better. Living costs—two years ago—were about *half* the current American rate;

and I haven't heard of any inflation since I was there; though some goods are rationed, since, in order to keep costs down, many of them come from England rather than from exorbitant America.

In short, Durban is a splendid modern city with every comfort of civilization—even American plumbing; and they're learning about refrigerators too.

Educational facilities? Plenty, for the young; and a good up-to-date library for students—though they haven't developed the elaborate night school facilities that we have for adults.

No hurricanes like you get in Miami—not even the gentle left-overs that come to us in St. Pete. Rainy season much like ours. No volcanoes.

Railroad communications with all the rest of Africa. Auto road to most of U.S.A., that's Natal, Transvaal, Cape, and W.A.

Electric power? Frankly, I don't know whether A.C. or D.C. You just use it and the question never comes up.

Automobiles: British makes are lots cheaper than American and are built to last longer, since money isn't as easy as here.

Failing Durban, Nairobi in Kenya would be my next bet—unless, possibly, Capetown.

Now your last question. You must work for a living? Hellish, ain't it? But surely a graduate nurse doesn't have to be afraid anywhere. Not even where sickness is as little as in Durban. BUT, "American concerns?" My dear good innocent East-Coaster, why must Americans always expect that the world is bulging with American business? Why, when American wages, goods, imports, everything, cost so much more than competing materials and services? I don't know of *any* American concerns in Durban—even things like Remington typewriter and Ford automobiles maintain local "agents", with *perhaps* an American technician as boss. You must remember that *all* the world's colonies would rather employ their own nationals than foreigners; and you, in Durban, or anywhere else, would be the foreigner. But I'm sure you needn't be afraid of finding work—though remember, not at American salaries. The *only* way to draw an American scale of pay is to sign up with some business *in America* and get sent out to a foreign activity. And remember again, more and more foreign countries and colonies are insisting that a certain percent of employes must be local citizens. For example, France compels American Express to employ French citizens, all but three per cent who may be American. United Fruit Co., operating in Latin America, may not now import more than four per cent American help. Union of South Africa, owing to Africaans influence does *not* maintain a similar British preference. The field is, officially, wide open; though you *may* meet with occasional local bias in favor of the uncles and the cousins and the aunts.

THE END

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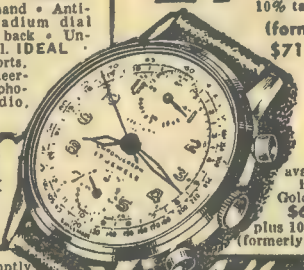

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(Continued from page 87)

trial in 1872. After a thorough tryout in competition with other revolvers, an initial order for eight thousand for cavalry use was placed by the government in 1873.

This Colt revolver immediately became very popular, and naturally was in great demand in the west.

It is interesting to note that Ned Buntline, pseudonym of E. Z. C. Judson whose prolific pen furnished many lurid tales of life on the plains for consumption east of the Mississippi River, had the Colt people make up five Single Action Army Revolvers with twelve inch barrels, instead of the usual seven and one half inch ones. These revolvers had special detachable shoulderstocks and beautiful hand-tooled holsters. That author presented these "Buntline Specials" to Bat Masterson, Bill Tilghman, Neal Brown, Charley Bassett, and Wyatt Earp. Earp, who was one of the best of the gunfighting U. S. Marshals, said that he could jerk the long-barreled revolver as fast as he could his older one with the shorter barrel.

The Colt Single Action Revolver in .45 caliber was known as the "Peacemaker," while in .44-40 caliber it was the "Frontier Model." By 1890 it was made in all calibers from .22 to .45. Having been manufactured from 1873 until World War II, it is problematical whether it will be produced again.

The big Colt had practically no competition from its introduction until after 1875, which were the years when the west was opening up in a big way, and the demand for reliable weapons was tremendous.

In the late 1860's a Russian Grand Duke came to the United States to purchase weapons for the Imperial Russian Army. While here he went on an extended hunting trip with "Buffalo Bill" William Cody. While on this trip the Grand Duke was so impressed by the performance of the Smith & Wesson (Colt's biggest competitor) .44 caliber revolver, which was Buffalo Bill's favorite handgun at the time, that he forthwith ordered 250,000 revolvers from the manufacturers. So, for what was probably the most important five years in the opening of the west, Smith & Wesson

worked supplying handguns for the Imperial Russian Army.

Thus we see that the Colt firm made hay while the sun was shining. By supplying a line of first quality weapons their prestige was so expanded that they became the largest manufacturers of first class pistols in the world.

Now, let's take a look at the lever action repeating rifle. In 1860 the New Haven Arms Co., owned by Oliver F. Winchester, a successful textile manufacturer, started making the Henry breechloading lever action repeating rifle. It fired a .44 caliber rimfire cartridge and had a fifteen shot tubular magazine located under the barrel. Strange as it may seem, this Henry rifle looked very much like the Winchester lever action repeater as manufactured today. A few of these rifles were used in the Civil War.

The rifle that had a big part in developing the fine reputation for the lever action repeaters was the Spencer. Its magazine held seven shots and it was loaded through a trap in the butt plate. A cartridge box containing ten tubes of seven cartridges each was used in conjunction with the arm, and the Spencer was said to be a rifle that could be loaded on Sunday, and fired all week.

In 1866 the New Haven Arms Co. disappeared from New Haven, Conn., and appeared in Bridgeport, Conn. as The Winchester Repeating Arms Co. In 1870 this company moved to new buildings in New Haven. In 1869 Winchester purchased The American Repeating Rifle Co., and 1870 The Spencer Repeating Rifle Co. The machinery of these two companies was moved to New Haven.

The Winchester Model 1866 was made in .44-28-200 caliber (.44 caliber, 28-grains of black powder, 200-grain bullet —a weak cartridge) until 1873, when our second hero of this piece, the Winchester Model 1873, was produced. This rifle was chambered for a more powerful cartridge that became the famous "Forty-four-forty" (.44-40-200), said to have killed more game and savages than all others together, of that time.

So, it's easy to understand why we associate the Colt Single Action Army Revolver and the Winchester Lever Action Rifle with early days in the Old West.

THE END

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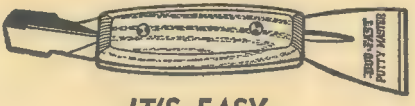

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(Continued from page 57)

scarred face, and the bosun had suffered other injuries about the body as he had struggled forward through the shaft alleyway and the engine-room. But in the bosun's face and eyes Fox read the agony the man had undergone. A mask-like rigor held the muscles of the jaw, and the eyes had a fixed, strained stare. For the first time, Fox understood what that confinement in the cold locker of the *Plank* had done to the bosun. A word from a book came into Fox's mind; the bosun had claustrophobia. It had demanded almost unbelievable courage for the bosun to decide to join him and the operator here.

Fox started to say something about that, to tell the bosun how much he admired him. But the bosun had just swung up the operator to one shoulder, lifted Fox to the other. Juggling them so, despite Fox's protests and the tremendous labor of the effort, the bosun went topside. He negotiated each ladder flight at a steady pace, crossed the main deck pasageway between waves, climbed the ladders to the radio shack. At the door there he lowered them down. "Get to work," he said. Then he turned and blinkered aft with the flashlight, "Set being repaired."

The operator swore in a hysterical voice. "I'm not sure I can fix it."

"Fix it, Sparks," Fox said softly, "or I'll fix you. . ."

The operator wept from nervous and mental exhaustion, but he began to work while Fox and the bosun cleared the deck of the shack.

FOX came down the Rue Taureau Trapu wearing a new shoreside suit and a grin. This was to be farewell to Tinette. He was going to navigation school when he got back to New York, then out in one of the company's ships as third mate. He had a string of pearls in his pocket for Tinette, and a pair of brass knucks for Vaano. Their manner of presentation would be different; he didn't want to be interrupted as he gave Tinette the pearls.

But at the bar of the Select to his great surprise he found the bosun. Vaano and

the bosun and Tinette were drinking brandy together in what seemed to be absolute amity. Fox hesitated, then came on in, his hand in his pocket and the knucks on his hand. "Fellar," Vaano told him, "you get to hell and stay to hell outa here. Tinette ain't for you now nor no time. You hear?"

Fox heard, but he also saw the bosun swing. The blow lifted Vaano at least a foot into the air, brought him down on the back of his neck in a corner. With a whoop, Fox sprang to the bar. He ran along it, the brass knucks forgotten. When Vaano got up and lunged at the bosun, Fox kicked him in field-goal style. It was to the point of the chin and very solidly delivered.

Vaano executed several steps which might have been those of a whirling dervish caught with epilepsy. Then the bosun hit him again, and then Fox hit him.

They each took turns throwing Vaano around the room. They broke its furniture on him and with him. Fox used a Pernod bottle for the *finale*. He smacked it over the crown of the pink skull and said, "Consider yourself launched in good style."

He remembered the pearls when he and the bosun were out in the street. "For you, baby," he said, and tossed them back in to Tinette.

Tinette looked glumly at them, at what was left of the Café Select and Vaano. From the noise along the street and from her wide knowledge of the city, she was aware that Marseilles as visited by Fox and the bosun was in for a big, a most *historique* night. She leaned her elbows firmly on the fractured bar and said to Vaano, "Get the swab."

Vaano dragged himself part upright and put his fingers to what had been his nose.

"I ain't much use," he mumbled.

"Then, stupid," Tinette said, "leave me! Maybe you think because those two have gone that this is a dump?"

"Yeah, sure," Vaano said.

But Tinette paid no attention to him. She was listening reverently to Fox's and the bosun's progress towards the Cannebiere.

THE END

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(Continued from page 47)

sixes. A hollow space, I told him, where something might be hidden. Or somebody. Maybe Jeff Acres.

"Mr. Acres isn't there," he said.

"Where is he?" I asked him, and I stopped breathing, waiting.

"Just outside," he said. "I'll get him for you."

He trotted across and unbarred the door.

"Come in, Mr. Acres, it's all right," he said—and Kalomiris slid through behind a Colt.

"Bar the door," he snapped at the kid. Nuri said, "Yes, Mr. Acres" and dropped the heavy bar back into the brackets.

"Sucker," Kalomiris said, in a voice like black vaseline.

"Will you take him to the police station?" the kid asked. "Will you pay me now?" He had trotted around in front, grinning up in expectation.

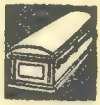
Kalomiris lifted the gun a few inches and dropped the butt into his face, smashing him to the floor but never taking the muzzle off my direction.

"You damn fool, you utter damn fool," he was saying, walking over to Mangangani, and kicking him, poking the kid's childish knots loose with a sharp-toed shoe. He went into Arabic, and his voice was getting shrill, hysterical.

He had me covered, with his back to the stack of coffins and I didn't see it happen until it was over. One of the caskets slipped, soundlessly, from the top of the stack, and the corner bit into Kalomiris' shoulder. He slewed sideways and his head snapped back, then forward.

He was dead before I thought to put my hands down.

"And a fine bloody long time it took you," somebody said, and Jeff Acres was climbing down from the top tier. I ran across and picked up the kid. His nose was broken but the skull seemed O. K.



WE prodded Mangangani to the pokey, first, then got the infant Einstein patched and paid. He was the big Nubian's nephew, and his arithmetic was sharp enough to let him slip out to send collect wires twice, from Jeff to me, as long as they were wrapped around a

profitable piaster. Even if he did think Kalomiris was named Acres.

Maynard brought us back to the warehouse with his crew, and we unstacked the boxes until we got down to the bottom row and saw the gap where Jeff had been planted, and the eight holes, through both ends of four boxes, he'd whittled with his belt buckle and his bloody stumps of fingers.

Then he'd played hide-and-go-seek among the loose lids on the top tier, ending up with a drop-shot on Kalomiris' bald spot.

"You just said two wires," I told him. "What about that stuff from the Koran?"

That was why the cops were picking up Bedawi, our clerk back in port, he said. Kalomiris wrote them, in Khartoum. Bedawi signed for them, in Port Sudan. And one was verse 216 out of the second chapter of the Koran, and the other was the title of verse 111, and the messages were to tip Bedawi off to the hot coffins.

Maynard was muttering about something. It made sense, too. "Why the hell did you go the long way—whittle eight holes, instead of turning around the other way where you could get out with only two cuts—through here?"

Jeff exploded. He couldn't tell where he was when he woke up. He couldn't turn around anyway. And he got Maynard to bend over the casket he was tapping. It was 111, and it was ticking.

We both went to the funeral of little Bhamdoun, Bedros Bhamdoun, the Egyptian political agent that had been tracking the Noose down and got too close to it. He'd suspected me for a while, Jeff said, but Jeff convinced him we were just hauling the coffins for the freight rates.

Jeff borrowed a friend's plane and we hopped back to the coast.

"I forgot to tell you I got some other business, before I got snagged, trying to help out Bhamdoun," he said.

Swell, I said. We had to get some freight or unload the tug.

"What's the cargo, Jeff?"

He banked, dipping a wing.

"Down there beside the barge," he said.

It was another stack of coffins.

THE END

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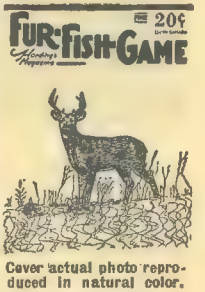

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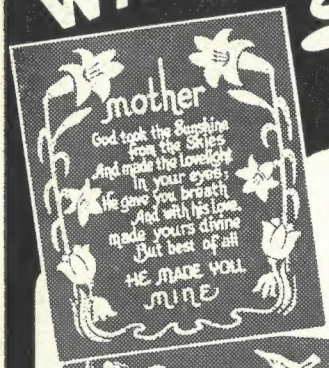

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